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## Engaging External Stakeholders to Improve Public-Private Partnership Water Project Completion Rates

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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John Kolman

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Engaging External Stakeholders to Improve Public-Private Partnership Water Project

Completion Rates

by

John Kolman

MBA, University of Phoenix, 2008

BS, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

January 2020

## Abstract

Public-private partnership (PPP) water projects may have competing external stakeholders, resulting in a disproportionately high project failure rate when compared to other types of infrastructure projects. Private companies and local governments use PPP projects as a means to bridge deficiencies in local government funding and knowledge to assist in bringing improved water to their communities. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to examine strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates. The study was grounded in Freeman's stakeholder theory. The participants consisted of 3 leaders who recently completed stakeholder activities for a PPP water project in the southwestern United States. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with additional supporting materials of public handouts, mailers, and news reports from the public domain. Data were analyzed using inductive coding. The themes that emerged included developing local knowledge of stakeholders, partnering with stakeholders, and effective communication with stakeholders. Leaders may use the study findings to assist in professional practice by helping to ensure successful PPP projects that can ultimately lead to a reduction in costs from negative stakeholder interactions. Implications for positive social change may include the potential for private companies to assist communities with increasing their success rates with PPP water projects to bring about crucial water infrastructure improvements.

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## Dedication

I want to dedicate this study to the importance of safe and clean water as a fundamental right. I would also like to dedicate this study to my family for their understanding and support along this journey. To my wife, Sherri thank you for support. To Gabriel and Gavin, may this study show how that lifetime learning is an invaluable endeavor.

## Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge my committee chair, Dr. Samora, whose unwavering dedication and support helped to make this study possible. I would also like to recognize the URR Dr. Laursen and the second committee member Dr. Mayo, for their invaluable feedback. To all of my classmates, thank you for all your input and help. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my family. The support and understanding of my family has made this journey possible.

## Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation of the Study.....	1
Background of the Problem .....	1
Problem Statement .....	2
Purpose Statement.....	3
Nature of the Study .....	3
Research Question .....	4
Interview Questions .....	4
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Operational Definitions.....	6
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	7
Assumptions.....	7
Limitations .....	7
Delimitations.....	8
Significance of the Study .....	8
Contribution to Business Practice.....	8
Implications for Social Change.....	9
A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature.....	9
Public-Private Partnerships.....	10
Critical Success Factors .....	20
Stakeholder Theory .....	29
Contrasting Views to Stakeholder Theory .....	34



Stakeholder Engagement .....	37
Stakeholder use in public-private partnerships projects .....	39
Transition .....	43
Purpose Statement.....	45
Role of the Researcher .....	45
Participants.....	48
Research Method and Design .....	49
Research Method .....	49
Research Design.....	51
Population and Sampling .....	53
Ethical Research.....	54
Data Collection Instruments .....	56
Data Collection Technique .....	58
Data Organization Technique .....	61
Data Analysis .....	62
Reliability and Validity.....	63
Reliability.....	64
Validity .....	65
Transition and Summary.....	68
Introduction.....	69
Presentation of the Findings.....	70
Theme 1: Developing Local Knowledge of Stakeholders .....	71

Theme 2: Partnering With Stakeholders .....	74
Theme 3: Effective Communication With Stakeholders .....	77
Theme 4: Defining Success .....	80
Applications to Professional Practice .....	82
Implications for Social Change.....	84
Recommendations for Action .....	85
Understanding the Local Stakeholders for the Project .....	86
Creating a Partnership With Stakeholders .....	87
Effective Communication .....	88
Defining Successful Stakeholder Engagement .....	88
Recommendations for Further Research.....	89
Reflections .....	90
Conclusion .....	91
References.....	93
Appendix A: Interview Protocol.....	113

## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their public-private partnership (PPP) project completion rates. In this section, I examine the background of the problem and the conceptual framework that I have chosen to examine the business problem. I also develop the research question for my study and the related interview questions. Related to my research question and case study methodology I discuss the assumption, limitations and delimitations of my study. Finally, I looked at the literature to gain a greater understanding of the problem and how my chosen conceptual framework applies.

### **Background of the Problem**

A PPP is an agreement between a private company and a governmental entity to provide for needed public services (Ameyaw & Chan, 2015). For this study, I examined the use of PPP within the water infrastructure context. A PPP arrangement can take several forms; however, in each case the private company assumes most of the project risk and responsibility in return for consistent revenue during the life of the project (Ameyaw & Chan, 2015). The benefit to governmental entities includes completing projects without additional levies on citizens and reducing overall project costs (Vedachalam, Geddes, & Riha, 2016). The need for PPP projects varies by country but in India alone an investment need from private companies of US \$ 174 billion has been forecasted from 2012 to 2031 (Mathur, 2017). PPP projects represent a business opportunity, have consistent revenue, and showcase new technologies to fulfill a community's needs.

Despite the need and advantages of PPP, the outcomes have been less than assured or uniform across the various regions and countries that use PPP. Vedachalam et al. (2016) stated that PPP in the water sector had a high rate of contract cancellations. In India, Vedachalam et al. attributed the high rate of failures and the disproportional risk with insufficient cost recovery and hostile stakeholders. Ameyaw and Chan (2015) found that understanding and managing the various project risks including stakeholder involvement was critical to having a successful PPP water project.

### **Problem Statement**

Companies using strategies of innovation, risk management, and stakeholder engagement use the public-private partnership (PPP) model to bridge the gap of local government's limited funding for water project to bring water to over 289 million people globally (Jensen, 2017). From 1990 to 2016, the World Bank reported that PPP water projects have the highest rate of project failure or duress at 6.9% representing 24% of total investment compared to electrical projects rate of 3.4% representing 4% of total investment (World Bank Group, 2016). The general business problem was PPP water projects have competing external stakeholders that have caused failed bids, costly renegotiations, and early termination of contracts resulting in a disproportionately high failure rate compared to other types of infrastructure projects (Vedachalam et al., 2016). The specific business problem was that some company leaders lack the strategies necessary to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates. The study population consisted of three leaders within a company in the southwestern region of the United States that engage in a PPP projects needing improved sources of water and who have successfully used external stakeholder engagement to improve their water infrastructure project completion rates. The implications for social change include the potential for more private companies to be successful in public partnerships to complete needed water infrastructure projects increasing the use of improved sources of water for local communities.

### **Nature of the Study**

Research methods possible for this study included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I selected the qualitative method to allow the exploration of external stakeholder strategies using open-ended interview questions. In qualitative research, the researcher uses open-ended questions to discover what is occurring or has occurred (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In contrast, quantitative researchers test hypotheses with independent and dependent variables (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Mixed methods research includes qualitative and quantitative research elements (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To explore external stakeholder engagement strategies with PPP, I did not test hypotheses which are part of a quantitative study and part of the quantitative portion of a mixed methods study.

I considered four research designs: (a) phenomenology (b) ethnography (c) narrative inquiry, and (d) case study. Researchers use phenomenology for in-depth study of human experiences, values, and feelings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Phenomenology is not the best fit for my study as I sought to understand corporate strategies, not personal values and feelings. Researchers use the ethnographic design to study a culture or social world of people who occupy the same space (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An ethnographic design was not be the best fit for this research as I have not studied culture or similar concerns. Researchers use narrative inquiry to tell a story of related events and the experience of a small homogenous group of individuals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A narrative design was not the optimal choice as I am attempted to gain perspective on the current situation from a diverse group and not tell the story of human experience. Case study researchers look at the *how and why* as they try to explain a present situation (Yin, 2018). I chose case study design for this research as I explored strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP water completion rates.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What system do you use to identify external stakeholders who play a role in your PPP project completion rates?
2. What are the most effective external stakeholder engagement strategies that you use to increase PPP project completion rates?

3. How did you assess the effectiveness of your external stakeholder strategies in increasing your PPP project completion rates?
4. What were the key barriers to implementing engagement strategies for your external stakeholders related to increasing PPP project completion rates?
5. How did you overcome these key barriers?
6. What other information could you add that might apply to the external stakeholder strategies for increasing PPP project completion rates?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I used stakeholder theory as originally presented by Freeman in 1984 as the conceptual framework for this study. The fundamental construct of Freeman's theory is that stakeholders can affect the achievement of the company's purpose, even when they compete with each other or the company (Freeman, 2010). To improve company outcomes, Freeman (2010) advocates for a system of strong stakeholder engagement to help a company's leaders better understand and respond to the environment in which the company operates. As part of understanding the existing operating environment, Freeman advocates for companies to undergo a process of stakeholder identification and then allocate resources and set milestones to monitor their stakeholder engagement strategies (Freeman, 2010). In this study, I sought to discover what strategies leaders use to engage external stakeholders with the goal of increasing PPP project completion rates. I choose Freeman's theory as the framework for the study since it aligns with the research question as I sought to understand external stakeholder engagement strategies.

## **Operational Definitions**

*Build-operate-transfer (BOT):* Build-operate-transfer contracts are associated with PPP projects and involve the private company building and operating the water infrastructure for a pre-determined period (World Bank Group, 2016). The period of the contract is typically for a short-term 1-5 years or long-term up to 30 years at the conclusion of the contract, the facility transfers back to the public agency (World Bank Group, 2016).

*Critical success factors (CSF):* Critical success factors are the elements that management focuses their time and project resources on a project that are crucial to the overall project success (Węgrzyn, 2016).

*Infrastructure:* Infrastructure is the entire system of structures designed for the treatment and distribution of safe pressurized water to various users (Jensen, 2017).

*Public-Private Partnership (PPP):* Public-private partnership is a type of long-term negotiated contract between a government and a private company to provide a service along with private financing associated with the design, construction, and operation of water infrastructure for which the private company receives payment in the form of tariffs (Moore, Boardman, & Vining, 2017).

*Tariff:* Tariff is a mechanism by which a private company recovers costs of water infrastructure, operations, debt servicing, and profits through user fees and provision services (Ameyaw, Chan, & Owusu-Manu, 2017).



## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed the idea that qualitative research must show that the results are reasonable to the study's phenomena and promote trustworthiness of the study. As part of the investigation of a phenomenon, the researcher has to acknowledge the existence of underlying assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of a study (Ellis & Levy, 2009). I will discuss the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study as they related to the research question and study's method and design.

### **Assumptions**

An assumption is a foundational concept to the study that the researcher believes to be true (Ellis & Levy, 2009). For this study, I made several assumptions. First, I assumed that the individuals I interviewed were truthful in their answers. The second assumption was that the interviewee has understood the questions posed especially if the individual was a non-native English speaker. Lastly, I assumed that the interviewees selected were able and willing to share information to address the research question through the interview questions I posed.

### **Limitations**

Ellis and Levy (2009) discussed limitations as those items or conditions beyond the control of the research that may negatively impact the study's validity. The study's interviewees were voluntary participants who may not be available later in the study to review interview transcripts for accuracy. The interviewees were related to one particular project, and their experiences were related to that project's circumstances and location.

**Delimitations**

Yin (2018) discussed the importance of setting boundaries in a case study so that data collected links to the research question. I have bound this study through a single case study design of one company's successful PPP water project. I have then further refined the boundaries through collecting data that relates to stakeholder engagement strategies in alignment with the research question.

**Significance of the Study**

PPPs are a mechanism to deliver a private sector's capital and innovation to meet the needs of local water infrastructure (Ileana & Cristina, 2015). Due to various demands among diverse external stakeholder groups, PPP water infrastructure projects have a disproportionately high failure rate when compared to other types of infrastructure projects (Vedachalam et al., 2016). The private company assumes most of the financial risk, as illustrated by Liu, Wang, and Wilkinson (2016) who found that the PPP bid process alone possessed a significant risk with bid costs accounting for up to 4% of the total project cost. Public-Private Partnerships project failure has a direct effect on the company's profitability.

**Contribution to Business Practice**

In 2013, PPP water projects served approximately 290 million persons worldwide (Jensen, 2017). In 2016, the World Bank Group alone invested \$1.9 billion in PPP water project in developing economies (World Bank Group, 2017). Public-Private Partnerships projects are an opportunity for a business to receive consistent revenue and profits from long-term contracts and to gain entry into new markets with the ability to bring new

products to those markets (Sabry, 2015). The value of the business practice is the development of external stakeholder strategies that can increase PPP project completion rates allowing companies to be successful in the marketplace.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (2017) share a community-based health goal to bring approximately 900 million people worldwide an improved source of water. Local governments turn to private companies under the PPP model to provide financing and technical knowledge for needed improved sources of water in their communities. The implications for social change include the potential for more private companies to be successful in completing needed PPP water infrastructure projects to bring needed improved sources of water for community-based health goals.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

A literature review is part of the study whereby a researcher can gain knowledge on a topic and help form the direction for their study (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum, 2017). Researchers conduct a literature review to examine relationships between the existing theory and practices as well as explore contrary or contrasting ideas (Onwuegbuzie & Weinbaum). In examining my research question, I sought to understand the relationships between PPPs and stakeholders and to explore all viewpoints.

The primary source of information in my literature review was peer-reviewed articles, governmental sources, and seminal books on stakeholder theory and case study methods. I identified 74 relevant peer-reviewed articles for my literature review from the

following databases available from the Walden University library: ABI/INFORM, Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, and Sage Journals. Additionally, I examined two governmental websites and one book pertinent to my study for total of 77 sources for this literature review. The sources I identified 74 articles of which have been peer reviewed and written in the past five years leaving 3 sources that are not peer reviewed. To ensure that the sources were peer reviewed, I used a combination of using Ulrich's Periodical Directory through Walden's library and reviewing various journal's submission procedures. The keywords used both in the singular and in combinations for the search included *engagement, infrastructure, policy, PPP, project, resources, stakeholder, success, and water*. The articles represent a diversity of international viewpoints reflective of the global use of PPP. I also examined governmental sources of information including the United Nations and the World Bank websites.

The literature review is structured by looking at PPP and the standard forms of use within the water industry. I have also examined the advantages and identified problems with PPP water projects. I have examined Freeman's stakeholder theory as the lens for examining the research question and identifying areas of conflicting ideas within the theory. Finally, I have considered the literature on existing stakeholder engagement strategies as applied to PPP projects.

### **Public-Private Partnerships**

The PPP project framework is in use globally to address a wide range of needs from social structures to all types of different general infrastructure needs (Reeves & Palcic, 2017). A closer look at the inside of the framework of PPP projects finds that the

essence of PPPs is the idea of the transferring of construction, market demand, and operational risks to the private company that is then incentivized to contain costs and seek to maximize operational efficiencies to maximize profit over a contractual timeline (Carpintero & Petersen, 2016). Public-Private Partnerships can represent a diverse universe of applications. To focus this literature review, I have explored the application of PPPs primarily through the lens of water infrastructure.

**Types of public-private partnerships.** An understanding of the forms or types of PPP projects in use is beneficial to understanding the context of studied projects and stakeholder engagement. While a form of contractual agreement governs all kinds of PPP, the risk and allocations and responsibilities can vary. Public-Private Partnerships are generally in one of four forms recognized in the literature. Within the management contract type of PPP, the private company takes over the daily operation of the established public water utility with the utility assets retained by a public entity (Mathur, 2017; Vedachalam et al., 2016). The management contract represents a low risk to both parties and with performance metrics and standards governing the private party actions. The second type of PPP is design-build, in which the private company is responsible for the design and construction of infrastructure to an agreed standard but has no operational responsibilities (Vedachalam et al.). In this scenario, the private company assumes the construction risk only. Design-build is most often used to construct facilities to serve the public infrastructure such as water treatment plants.

The third type of PPP project is the build operate (BOT), the company assumes the construction and design risk and along with the risk of operating or the market risk for the

infrastructure during the contracted period before turning it back to the public entity (T. Liu, Wang, & Wilkinson, 2016; Vedachalam et al.). Many PPP projects fall under the BOT framework as local governments look to increase or improve water delivery services.

The last common type of PPP is full privatization or concession where a governmental entity transfers the entire public asset to the private entity for operation and maintenance either for a set period or indefinitely (Jensen, 2017; Vedachalam et al.). As an example, in the United States, concession PPPs occur most often in the form of our private utilities such as natural gas, power, telecom, and water.

In most cases, PPP takes on one of the four main recognized forms. Zhang, Gao, Feng, and Sun (2015) pointed out that PPPs can be reconceptualized depending on the country and contractual context. Evidence of evolving PPPs structures both in concept and in the field is provided by several examples. In Ghana, PPP projects are hybrids so that there is a focus on developing local capacity for managing public water systems (Ameyaw Effah, Chan, & Owusu-Manu, 2015). The hybridization model creates less infrastructure risk for the private company, and in return the governmental entity shares part of a revenue (Ameyaw Effah et al.). In Manila, the concession PPPs combines with a regulatory body that reviews the tariffs periodically through a set contractual procedure (Jensen, 2017). Officials in Manila's use the system of concession PPPs in conjunction with tariff reviews to ensure the long-term viability of the operations. Public-Private Partnerships are known in certain situations to evolve into a joint venture between the

government entity and the private sector as Andrews, Esteve, and Ysa (2015) noted in a review of projects in the United Kingdom.

Lastly, Jensen pointed out that some forms of PPP might derive project benefits when the local governmental entity has an equity stake in the private company involved. Rather than be confined to a set category, PPP projects can lie along a continuum of recognized forms and structures. Governments and private companies through the use of the PPP project framework have the ability to conform the project through the contract to the particular application and the existing operating environment.

**Use and benefits of public-private partnerships.** Across the globe, the need for PPP projects stems from addressing a shortfall of local governmental entities either in technical capacity or financial capability. One of the added benefits of addressing deficiencies through PPP projects is a way to change any perceived inefficiency of public entities in favor of innovative private companies (Zhang et al., 2015). In Ghana the existing water infrastructure is plagued with inefficiencies from weak financial controls, lack of tariffs and inadequate staffing (Ameyaw et al., 2017). In Ghana's setting of insufficient or lack water infrastructure, PPP projects can be a way to finance and improve service delivery with little upfront costs from the local government. Similarly, the Chinese Government has introduced PPP in the form of BOT as a way to drive foreign investment and finance part of their immediate infrastructure demands expected over 550 billion USD (Zhang et al.). In India, Mathur (2017) discussed that to solve poor or nonexistent water infrastructure issues throughout India's regions the expenditures are projected to be 8.5 billion USD a year for the next 20 years. The PPP model is attractive

to local governments in India to solve their infrastructure needs because they cannot raise financing capital through bonds and are reluctant to increase taxation (Vedachalam et al., 2016). Patil, Tharun, and Laishram (2016) further discussed that the Indian government's financial ministry developed a goal through their planning commission that calls for one half of the of the projected 900 billion dollar investment in infrastructure should come from private investment.

Europe also used PPP projects in a similar way to Asia and Africa for technical capacity or financial capability. As an example in Ireland, local governments have used PPP projects financial capability as a way to gain access to private financing as a way to defer payments into the future and while reaping current political gains from improved infrastructure (Reeves & Palcic, 2017). Reeves and Palcic noted that in their examination of Ireland's PPP that before the economic recession PPPs was used as an investment vehicle to augment governmental spending to address urgent needs in the renovating and construction of new infrastructure. Post-recession Ireland looked to have PPP projects as a way to supplant governmental spending as the amount of all types of governmental infrastructure spending went from the pre-recession amount of 6.7% of the gross domestic product to 3.2% (Reeves & Palcic). Similarly, as Garrido, Gomez, Baeza, and Vassallo (2017) noted that in Spain, the PPP model is used extensively to address the lack of financing from the local governmental entity.

**Public-private partnerships for economic stimulus.** The goal in some PPP projects is to address shortfalls in capability or financing. Additionally, PPP projects can provide for crucial infrastructure support which is then used to achieve other desired



outcomes such as economic growth or public health goals. In the two developing economies of Bangladesh and Pakistan, the respective governments determined that PPP projects have the ability to bring direct private foreign investment to improve infrastructure which can benefit citizens as well as allow private industry for these countries to expand and grow (Anwar, Zhongdong Xiao, Abbas, & Ali, 2018). The European Union has also looked at PPP projects as part of the larger picture of economic stimulus for various regions (Ileana & Cristina, 2015). The stimulus derives from direct foreign investment in construction and related activities.

**Public-private partnerships in public health.** In looking at PPP projects specific to water and public health, the WHO estimated that in 2015, 29% of the global community was without access to a safely managed water supply (World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, 2017). In the case of India, local poor water quality can be tied to the incidence of diarrhea illness with loss of over 500,000 lives annually and economic impact of 73 million fewer working days (Vedachalam et al., 2016). Leviäkangas, Kinnunen, and Aapaoja (2016) discussed health benefits from water projects represent an underreported intrinsic value to the community. Countries and communities use PPP projects to bring safe water to their residence and help meet the WHO's goals of bringing safe, reliable water sources to the community.

**Issues and problems.** The Use of PPP projects to bring benefits to the community are not always clear and assured. In Great Britain for example, approximately 88% of PPP projects awarded ended prematurely (Ileana & Cristina, 2015). When looking at the failure rate of water infrastructure projects universally, Vedachalam et al.

(2016) reported that the rate of failure was around 9% representing 25% of the investment compared to 5% failure rate representing 5% of investment with other types of infrastructure projects. Vedachalam et al. further discussed that water infrastructure, in particular, has a low recovery rate for costs and high public visibility, coupled with higher failure rates could lead to issues attracting private and institutional financing. The World Bank's project database shows the water infrastructure lower than other types of PPP infrastructure projects both in the number of projects and in investment dollars (Ameyaw et al., 2017). Water infrastructure PPP projects have a higher incidence of failure as the PPP project potentially present challenges of heavy governmental involvement, lower levels of profitability and direct exposure to citizen and user dissatisfaction (Jensen, 2017). Lloyd Owen (2016) noted, for example, that reuse water projects have a higher success rate compared to water and wastewater projects due in part to the less direct public interface.

**Public-private partnerships risk allocation.** A more in-depth look into the process and risk allocations of PPP projects, when compared to traditional procurement, finds that in some instances PPP can only offer an advantage only when the private entity can provide a clear technical advancement thereby reducing cost and increasing the public benefit (Moore et al., 2017). Atmo, Duffield, Zhang, and Wilson (2017) examined the cost difference between traditional government procurement and the PPP process and found no significant difference in the projects that they studied. Additionally, Zeneli (2017) looked at Albania PPP water projects and found that project construction costs were 25% higher and served as a way to obscure public borrowing. In contrast, when

Carbonara, Costantino, and Pellegrino (2016) examined PPP transactional costs they found costs in line with traditional procurement. Carbonara, Costantino, and Pellegrino (2016) based their findings on selecting the correct contract methodology, negotiated procedures and a high degree of competition. The potential lack of tangible cost savings and issues of public benefits highlights the need to understand each planned use of PPP and the associated risks both to the private company and the governmental entity.

Prachitha, Mahalingam, Deep, and Thillairajan (2015) found that if access and quality are the primary goals, PPP alone will not meet those goals and better policies and incentives are needed. In looking to achieve PPP goals of lower customer costs the importance of clear documentation and expectations are crucial (Hong, 2016).

The PPP bidding process can represent a significant risk to private companies who rely on precise documentation and expectations from the governmental entity in their bid tendering. As an example of the risk in the bidding and contracting process in Australia, the costs relating to PPP projects can account for 2.5-4% of the total cost of the project (T. Liu et al., 2016). Failure to secure a bid can be costly for a company, especially in light of weak documentation or unrealistic expectations.

**Public-private partnerships Opportunism.** With the complexities of PPP bidding and contracting processes, J. Liu, Gao, Cheah, and Luo (2017) considered that opportunism that may occur. The fact that PPP fulfills a needed role of providing financing, technical knowledge or reduced cost may push one of the partners towards opportunism. In this context, opportunism requires a party to operate in a specific way to

knowingly lie or cheat to create a disadvantage for the other party (J. Liu, Gao, Cheah, & Luo, 2017).

Governmental opportunism may occur due the knowledge that companies may experience substantial upfront costs in the preparation and submission a bid. Private companies have desire to receive a contract thereby allowing them to recover their initial investment as well as earn a consistent revenue stream. In some cases, the governmental entities are aware of this cost and can take actions that may be viewed as opportunistic by withholding crucial information regarding existing infrastructure conditions or critical stakeholder concerns (Valero, 2015). The governmental entity may also alter the contract after selection of a company to renegotiating tariffs and other key contract functions to gain political support (J. Liu et al. 2017). The danger is that any compromises in the contract after the award may affect the long-term viability of the project especially with tariffs or terms of service. The result of opportunistic behavior within the governmental side is that there may be fewer companies willing to bid for contracts reducing any potential cost savings through the competitive process of having multiple companies compete.

Unfortunately, opportunism within the PPP context is not strictly related to the governmental entity. J. Liu et al. (2017) pointed out that the complexity of PPP projects and the associated contracts can lead to opportunism on the part of the private companies. The opportunism can lead companies to take shortcuts with the contracted infrastructure upkeep and replacement (J. Liu et al., 2017). The failure to maintain infrastructure can lead to loss of service and increased costs to the government when receiving the project

back as illustrated by the case of Shajiao B power plant in China (J. Liu et al.). J. Liu et al. described the case of the power plant that was run by foreign investors to maximize return on investment resulting in abnormal equipment damage ultimately leaving the government responsible.

In combating adverse outcomes from governmental opportunism, it is important to have explicit contractual agreements with good legal foundations free of political influences. However, as Marques (2018) emphasized that having explicit contractual agreements may be not enough to guarantee long-term project success. The idea that PPP projects should have supervision and refereeing mechanism to ensure transparency and accountability with all stakeholders involved (Marques 2018). Additionally, Verhoest, Petersen, Scherrer, and Soeipto (2015) discussed the importance of having laws and regulations in place to support PPP projects and that companies need to be aware of the variations that can exist in PPP projects implementation across the national borders.

**Public-private partnerships with financial closure.** At the completion of the bidding process, the next step for a PPP project is securing financing. Babatunde and Perera (2017) looked specifically at financial closure aspect of projects within Nigeria. Financial closure is a critical milestone in the PPP project and signifies that financing is in place and funds are available to start the project implementation.

Babatunde and Perera (2017) developed a questionnaire for the primary stakeholder groups based on critical success factors for PPP projects within Nigeria. Based on a literature review conducted by Babatunde and Perera the questionnaire consist of 39 unique factors. Babatunde and Perera identified 81 individual stakeholders for their

study from three main groups involved with PPP projects governmental agencies, private companies, and private financing. Babatunde and Perera received 60 valid responses to determine how the 39 factors ranked within the stakeholder organizations. Babatunde and Perera concluded that the top factors preventing financial closure include the economic conditions, regulatory framework, poor engineering and disputes among partners.

Similarly, Jin Wu, Liu, Jin, and Sing (2016) found that government involvement helped to produce successful outcomes by implementing a mechanism of loss and profit sharing plan. Public-Private Partnership financing plays an essential role in successful projects and cannot be understated. Public-Private Partnership financing can also cause issues as Patil et al. (2016) discussed the idea that financial considerations can lead to needed projects not receiving attention since businesses will migrate towards projects that produce higher profits and meet financial expectations. Additionally, the idea that Babatunde and Perera raise with disputes among partners in an interesting thought considering that their study targeted study was with stakeholders. The link to financial feasibility with stakeholders disputes brings into focus the need to address stakeholder issues to bring about PPP project success.

### **Critical Success Factors**

Looking at the types of PPP, use and benefits of PPP and issues and problems of PPP project the question arises are their specific factors that can predict or contribute to PPP project success. Project managers measure project success with traditional objective methods of time and costs or with alternative subjective methods such as meeting stakeholder expectations (Osei-Kyei, Chan, Javed, & Ameyaw, 2017). An additional

approach to project success may be satisfying and achieving the stated goals and objectives of a given project (Węgrzyn, 2016). Therefore, a project can be considered successful by the involved parties even if there were time and cost overruns if it meets the overall objectives of bringing safe water to the community. Several authors have examined what is known as critical success factors relating (CSF) to PPP projects.

**Critical success factors defined.** In examining the question of what are the CSFs in PPP projects, the idea of looking at CSFs in different ways occur. In their discussion of CSFs Babatunde, Perera, Zhou, and Udejaja (2016) observed that the use of CSF stems from information systems and project management. Osei-Kyei et al. (2017) examined PPP project factors and asserted that CSFs are factors that drive projects forward toward success. Sanni (2016) defined CSF as key activities needed to ensure overall project success. Further refining the idea of CSFs, Węgrzyn (2016) discussed the role of management focusing their time and resources on those factors crucial to project success while incorporating the concept of stakeholder involvement.

In consideration of stakeholder involvement, the idea of CSFs acquires qualitative aspects. As Osei-Kyei and Chan (2017a) discussed that individuals involved with PPP projects view CSF, to include both quantitative measures such as time, cost and quality and qualitative criteria such as environmental impact, trust, and community involvement partnerships. Similarly, Patil et al. (2016) found that sustainability as part of environmental protection is an important factor given the government's participation in PPP projects. Understanding of CSF can allow the practitioner to focus resources in areas that can provide the most significant impact on a project.

**Critical success factors examined.** To understand CSFs in relation to PPP success rates, it is essential to review previous work and identify possible common themes. The development of common themes will help guide further research. Within the PPP infrastructure context, several authors have identified CSFs and ranked their relative importance. Osei-Kyei et al. (2017) conducted a questionnaire survey including respondents from both the academic and industry sectors with in-depth knowledge of PPP projects success. Osei-Kyei et al. sent a questionnaire out to 310 of their identified experts and received 42 valid responses back representing various individuals from several world regions, in both academic and industry positions. Of the 15 original CSFs Osei-Kyei et al. found that seven of their criteria were very critical including risk management, meeting specifications, meeting service requirements, meeting deadlines, meeting a public need, profitability and long-term partnerships. Osei-Kyei et al. findings in their study are interesting as they relate to the use of PPP projects in meeting the public demand for services and the desire for long-term partnerships between the public and private organizations.

**Critical success factors for Nigeria public-private partnership projects.** Sanni (2016) sought to determine the success factors in PPP projects specific to Nigeria. Sanni looked at 15 studies to identify 28 CSFs for PPP implementation for the study. Sanni sent out 255 surveys based on the non-probability convenience sampling method and snowball sampling to identify other participants outside the original scope. The respondents for the survey included various professionals from both the private and public sectors with various jobs (Sanni). The survey had a response rate of 72% with 184



completed surveys (Sanni). The respondents were asked to use a Likert scale for each listed CSF. Unlike Osei-Kyei et al. (2017), Sanni sought to understand CSFs relative to the public and private sectors. The first public sector factor identified by Sanni is leadership and includes partnership, open communication, and alignment with governmental strategic objectives. The next public sector factor is risk allocation ensuring appropriate allocation of risks, and the project has the economic viability to be successful. The last public sector factor is feedback which aids in the identification of challenges so that mitigating actions can take place in future projects. Similarly, from the private side, the first factor is a favorable economic condition. The next private factor is political support followed by a short construction period. Lastly is providing a public service to meet users' expectations which is critical to receiving public acceptability and resulting long-term profitability. Sanni's study is focused on Nigeria; however, within a broad context, Sanni's findings in the study does reinforce some of Osei-Kyei et al. finding with risk management, meeting a public need and long-term partnerships. Additionally, both Sanni's and Osei-Kyei et al's findings indicate similar CSFs of demonstrating that meeting users expectations relate to public acceptability and ultimately linking to company profitability.

Similar to Sanni (2016), Babatunde, Perera, Zhou, and Udejaja (2016) examined PPP projects within Nigeria but focused on stakeholder perceptions of PPP projects. Babatunde et al. (2016) performed a literature review to develop a list of 26 CSFs. Babatunde et al. used the term of stakeholders to define the various groups and developed a list of 173 stakeholder organizations involved with PPP projects representing the public

sector, concessionaires, financial, consultants and contractors. Babatunde et al. received 113 responses back on the questionnaire that looked at ranking the 26 identified CSFs. Babatunde et al. found that six factors rated as most critical by the stakeholder groups for PPP projects they were a transparent procurement process, effective management, good governance, economic viability, a good investment environment, and technical feasibility. Similar to previous authors some similar themes with CSFs as they relate to stakeholders such as effective management, good governance, economic viability

### **Critical success factors for Indian public-private partnerships projects.**

Swamy, Tiwari, and Sawhney (2018) looked at the CSFs specific to PPP water projects in India. Similar to Babatunde et al. (2016) the part of the focus was on stakeholder perceptions within India. Swamy et al. (2018) developed factors based on India's context and recognizing the impact that various stakeholders have on overall project success. Swamy et al. emphasized stakeholders as part of a broader push by the Indian government to bring private and public stakeholders into a comprehensive policy framework to provide water services throughout the country.

Swamy et al. (2018) in developing and finalizing the final seven factors used a pilot survey to understand the factors important in the Indian water PPP context and to assist in identifying experts. Based on the pilot survey, Swamy et al. designed a structured questionnaire to collect empirical data containing pairwise comparisons between the seven factors. Swamy et al. received 26 responses out of 31 questionnaires sent representing our major stakeholder groups who actively participate in the development, operations and maintenance water of PPP projects. The author then sent the

questionnaire to select group comprising of individuals from the government, private sector, financial institutions, and consultants. The ranked finding in order (a) stakeholder consent and support; (b) the correct project structure; (c) realistic expectations on service delivery; (d) water tariffs aligned with economic conditions; (e) public sector contract management; (f) well-developed market for the services; and (g) independence of the agency enforcing regulations. Swamy et al. findings with project CSF finding aligns with Babatunde et al. findings with regards to meeting specifications, meeting service requirements, meeting deadlines, meeting a public need, and profitability.

**Critical success factors comparison in different economies.** In contrast to previous authors who looked at county-specific CSFs, Osei-Kyei and Chan (2017a) looked at comparing and contrasting critical success factors in different economies of Ghana and Hong Kong. Osei-Kyei and Chan conducted an empirical survey using the Likert scale and reported receiving 103 responses for a 64.1% response rate. Osei-Kyei and Chan then applied statistical analysis and found that there were marked differences in how Ghana and Hong Kong view the critical success factors.

Hong Kong ranked staying on budget as number one compared to Ghana which ranked profitability as number one (Osei-Kyei & Chan). When Osei-Kyei and Chan looked at both economies minimizing political protest, and long-term partnerships came in at number eight and nine respectively out of the 15 success factors. Osei-Kyei & Chan contributed the variable to the local conditions and expectations of PPP and stressed the need to understand how local conditions may impact PPP. However, despite the differences when looking at CSFs within different country contexts, some similar

underlying, themes appear along with the idea that various stakeholder groups influence CSF within the PPP project.

Based on geographic and cultural considerations Nigeria and India may be expected to approach PPP water projects differently. However, despite the differences when looking at PPP project CSFs within different country contexts, some similar underlying, themes appear to develop. The PPP project themes center along with the idea that various stakeholder groups exert an influence on CSF within a given PPP project outside geographic location.

**Critical success factors for developing countries to attract private investment.**

Ameyaw et al. (2017) examined CSFs specific to attracting companies to water projects in developing countries. After performing a literature review, 17 success factors were considered relevant to the study. The authors chose 32 experts in PPP projects and administered a questionnaire based on the success factors using a Likert scale to rate each factor. The top CSF is the political commitment or the government entity's ability and willingness to support and ensure the economic feasibility of a PPP project (Ameyaw et al., 2017). The political support is a key element because PPP water projects attract foreign investment which can lead to social and economic issues and ultimately result in early termination of contracts (Ameyaw et al., 2017). The second factor identified is dedicated governmental office to helping PPP projects with procurement and local knowledge. The third factor is public sector partners having a robust understanding of technical issues and risk management of water utilities. Ameyaw et al., findings highlight the need for governments to develop clear goals and policies to help facilitate PPP

projects. Which is then reinforced by Sabry (2015) findings that good governmental institutions are especially the bureaucratic process and regulations and key success factors in PPP.

**Critical success factors within public-private partnerships bidding.** T. Liu et al. (2016) looked at CSF within the bidding process for PPP projects within Australia and China. In looking at the bidding process T. Liu et al., looked at CSF for PPP implantation within the literature to develop eleven critical factors for PPP projects. To supplement the existing literature the T. Liu et al., conducted face-to-face interviews in Melbourne and Beijing, to collect qualitative data on the issues identified. T. Liu et al. conducted a total of 15 interviews eight of which were from Melbourne. J. Liu et al., The interviews while highlighting differences between the two countries highlighted similarities to T. Liu et al., literature review with a well-developed business case, clear proposal, public sector capacity, and competitive and transparent bidding process. T. Liu et al. did note one exception that they found during the interviews effective communication was a theme for CSF. After the interviews T. Liu et al. then conducted a targeted questionnaire of 154 PPP professionals in Australia and China. J. Liu et al. reported that they had a response from 57 individuals. Based on the statistical analysis there was a difference noted in CSFs for Australia versus China in that Australia ranked the project pipeline as number one compared to China ranking leadership and official public involvement (T. Liu et al.).

**Critical success factors within public-private partnerships operations.** Osei-Kyei and Chan (2017b) Sought to understand how different views of stakeholders impact how PPP project success within the operational phase. In looking at the operational phase

of a project Osei-Kyei and Chan, are concerned with the daily administration of a PPP contract, comprising of the operation and maintenance aspects. To further frame their study Osei-Kyei and Chan, discussed the critical nature of providing uninterrupted service delivery to users, and that consumer satisfaction should be a primary priority. Osei-Kyei and Chan developed 19 CSFs based on a review of previous studies. Osei-Kyei and Chan, developed a questionnaire survey on the 19 CSFs using a seven-point Likert scale with targeted population practicing and experienced PPP experts from the academic, public and private sectors worldwide. The sample population consisted of 310 experts of which Osei-Kyei and Chan, received 42 valid responses. In reviewing and analyzing the results Osei-Kyei and Chan noted that while there was a measurable variation in the ratings between the public, private and academic sectors, they also agreed in one aspect of CSF, the use of payment mechanism structure. This finding supported by the finding by Sanni (2016) who indicted a measurable difference between public and private CSF perceptions. The other interesting conclusion is that open and frequent communication was ranked the highest with public entities but much lower with academic and private entities. In Osei-Kyei and Chan's, discussion they point to the fact that different stakeholder groups have different priorities once the PPP project enters the operational phase. Given PPP project difficulties throughout their lifespan, further understanding stakeholders and their priorities may be needed to assist in PPP project completions.

## Stakeholder Theory

Examining the critical success factors for PPP projects highlights the diversity of projects and approaches and the importance of understanding that is potential mitigating factors to help ensure project success. One recurring theme within the CSF is that some form of stakeholder involvement is crucial. As highlighted by Swamy et al. (2018) stakeholders are an essential consideration in India's PPP projects. Expanding our view of PPP projects Osei-Kyei and Chan (2017b) discussed the perception that stakeholders play an essential role in PPP operations across national boundaries. Ameyaw and Chan (2016) concluded from their Delphi study that stakeholder involvement is essential throughout the project lifecycle. The perspective that stakeholder involvement is a crucial CSF is reinforced by Babatunde and Perera (2017) work that competing stakeholder interests can delay project funding and Jensen (2017) discussion that PPP water projects face high failure rates because of direct citizen and user interaction and dissatisfaction.

Burke and Demirag (2017) discussed Freeman's Stakeholder Theory as a way to examine the stakeholders within the PPP context and bring an approach to better understand the application stakeholder CSFs to increase project success rates. Freeman in 1984 introduced his stakeholder theory in the book *Strategic Management A Stakeholder approach* (Freeman, 2010). The essence of Freeman's theory is that various groups or individuals can impact a company's operations or the desired outcomes. It is important to recognize that Freeman's approach stakeholders can cause both positive and negative impacts. To mitigate against negative influences, Freeman advocates several steps as part of the company's strategic management or planning process. Since the introduction

Freeman's theory, the idea of stakeholder involvement has gain acceptance especially with the construction industry as a way address and manage stakeholders as interregnal part of project management (Chan & Oppong, 2017).

**Stakeholder.** Freeman (2010) discussed stakeholders as an integral part of a company's operations. In Freeman's discussion, the concept of a stakeholder predates his 1984 theory. However, the concept was narrow in the approach to impacting business strategy. In expanding the use and application of stakeholders Freeman advocates for a strategic planning approach with the idea of an expanded role for a stakeholder. In Freeman's discussion, the idea of stakeholder is expansive. In one example, an airline considered terrorist factions a stakeholder due to their impact on company operations (Freeman). In broad terms, a stakeholder can affect or is affected by a company meeting its purpose and can be composed of an individual or groups of individuals (Freeman). By expanding the role of the stakeholder unique dynamics are created both for the company and impacted stakeholders.

In the case of PPP projects, the company's purpose is the successful project completion it may be appropriate to look at how several authors have looked at stakeholders within the project management area. Additionally, to narrow the scope of stakeholder discussions, I will be concerned with external stakeholders that exist outside the traditional corporate structure. Mok, Shen, Li, and Yang (2017) discussed stakeholders represent a diversity of backgrounds and who have an active interest in a particular project. Additionally, Mok, Shen, Li, et al., discussed the idea that stakeholders may be in conflict with each other and the company since their interests may not align.



Burke and Demirag (2017) pointed out that the interest in the project is a key consideration for a stakeholder even if the company has little interest in them. While Benn, Abratt, and O’Leary (2016) further looked at stakeholders by placing them into two distinct groups. Primary stakeholders can affect the project directly and often have a contractual relationship (Benn et al., 2016). Secondary stakeholders can affect or influence company behavior but do not have a contractual relationship (Benn et al.). Eskerod and Ang (2017) add to the stakeholder landscape by including in their definition that stakeholders affect project through the contribution of resources or other tangible contributions. While Di Maddaloni and Davis (2017) discussed that stakeholders operating within project context may be considered a kind of a temporary organization and echoed Mok, Shen, Li et al. (2017) in that stakeholders may have a variety of interest conflicts. Looking at the stakeholder landscape there clearly a range of groups and individuals that can be considered stakeholders. Since stakeholders can affect a PPP project’s successful engagement with the various stakeholders then becomes an essential consideration for the company.

**Stakeholder engagement.** Stakeholder engagement is vital since stakeholders can be a source of project problems contributing to delays, and cost overruns Mok, Shen, and Yang (2017). Also when Babatunde, Perera, Zhou, and Udejaja (2015) looked at barriers to PPP project potential conflicts of interest among stakeholders ranked highest in the barriers ranked. Stakeholder engagement is analyzing, stakeholder influence and then developing strategic interventions (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016). In managing stakeholder relationships Freeman (2010) proposed a process with three interrelated

ideas, identifying who are stakeholders, determining appropriate management interventions and looking at the transactional process between the stakeholders and the company.

Stakeholder identification extends beyond mere categorization but instead sees to understand the stakeholder within a particular context. Public-Private Partnership water projects, in particular, have many varied stakeholders that will to some degree have involvement throughout the life cycle of the project. Eskerod and Larsen (2018) discussed that stakeholders for projects exist within a broader context of stakeholder's future expectations, their network, and concurrent activities. In understanding stakeholders, the goal is to develop effective communication, and some degree affects the behaviors towards the project (Oppong, Chan, & Dansoh, 2017). Helping to understand stakeholders, in particular, their behaviors Teo and Loosemore (2017) looked at classifying stakeholders through determination of power, legitimacy, and urgency. Stakeholder power relates to the ability of stakeholders to influence a project's design and implementation (Júnior, Porto, Pacífico, & Salgado Júnior, 2015). Pagnussatt, Petrini, Santos, and Silveira (2018) also support the idea of stakeholder power influencing the company and relevant decision makers. Legitimacy speaks to the stakeholder's claim to the project, and it is the outcome Pittz and White (2017). Urgency is an expression of how stakeholders perceive the expected speed that their claims are considered and acted on (Burke & Demirag, 2017). Legitimacy is a factor in the work of Pittz and Adler, they identified in their study of having stakeholders within a participatory decision-making process which can help drive company strategy. The

ultimate goal in understanding external stakeholder is to develop strategic management interventions tailored to the project's stakeholders.

Management interventions seek to address stakeholders' concerns and ultimately reduce project difficulties. As Cunliffe, Locke and Hayes (2016) pointed out there is no universal intervention within strategic management. Each intervention is specific to the company and the project, however, there may be general steps or strategic areas that are in common with projects. Freeman (2010) discussed the steps to assist companies in addressing interventions. After understanding who the stakeholders relevant to the company, Freeman discussed articulating the relationship between the company and the stakeholders and then seek to change or establish new relationships with stakeholders. In articulating the stakeholder relationships, Freeman discussed assessing stakeholder behavior in its current state, looking at the potential for a corporation and looking at behaviors that would prevent company success. The result is that based on identifying stakeholders and understanding behaviors is to develop strategic programs specific to the situation and the groups of stakeholders. Heravi, Coffey, and Trigunarsyah (2015) found that stakeholders can play a role in project success or failure and that identifying those key stakeholders is essential to developing strategic programs.

To be valuable to a company the developed strategic programs must become implemented programs. As a part of the implementation Freeman (2010) discussed that programs must be turned into action through resource allocation, accountability of responsible individuals and having a timeline. The other part of strategic program implementation is looking at the results. In this case looking at the degree to which a

project or company has been able to influence stakeholder behaviors is an outcome as part of project success. Freeman discussed the idea of keeping score with stakeholders by developing relevant measurements. Davis (2017) noted that the perceptions of stakeholders varied by group and so measurements of success also varied. Similarly, Kivila, Martinsuo, and Vuorinen (2017) also found that measurements of success depend on the project context and stakeholders. Understanding relevant stakeholders allows for a company to develop meaningful measures for the company's strategic implementation.

### **Contrasting Views to Stakeholder Theory**

Several contrasting views to Stakeholder theory occur. One view is that the company should be responsible to their shareholders as opposed to stakeholders. In the shareholder view, the company should be perusing ways to maximize the return on capital within the market irrespective of competing stakeholder interests (Denis, 2016). Denis argued that stakeholders and shareholders do not necessarily need to be in tension with each other since the long-term survivability of the company is in their shared interests. Looking at especially PPP water projects, there is documentation that external stakeholders impact the project. Since I am not concerned with company performance within the broader market per se but rather project specific attributes that lead to a measure of success I sought out additional contrasting views to Freeman's theory. I identified two other relevant views of that in tension with stakeholder theory the first is with how stakeholders are defined and second looks at theories of the normative construct within a cultural consideration.

**Stakeholder defined.** One challenge to Freeman's Stakeholder theory is how stakeholders are defined. Miles (2017) discussed the idea that how stakeholders are defined is a contested idea. Miles pointed out that contestation in this context is about the variations of the stakeholder definition that authors expressed in concept or practice. Similarly, Pittz and Adler (2016) discussed from the idea that the definition of stakeholders is open since Freeman only gave broad guidelines in his theory. Researchers using stakeholder theory as their research lens have the challenge of defining who stakeholders are. Defining stakeholders is part of the essential function of developing strategic interventions and developing measurements of project success. To address the challenge to the definition Miles, discussed the idea of developing a classification system for stakeholders to facilitate and allow for debate on stakeholder identification within a continuum rather than on narrowed definitions. Similarly, Benn et al. (2016) discussed the idea that stakeholder theory lacks clarity in defining stakeholders and therefore is dependent on the assumption of relationships between companies and individuals or groups. Benn et al. conducted a case study of interviewing company management and stakeholders of a paint company in South Africa. Benn et al., conclude that in defining stakeholders by their legitimacy is an important attribute to be recognized. In a case study done by Colvin, Witt, and Lacey (2016) found that one of the reasons for a public projects failure was tied directly to the perceived legitimacy of various stakeholder groups.

**Normative construct.** In traditional stakeholder theory by Freeman, a company is responsive to various stakeholder groups. The Balakrishnan, Malhotra, and Falkenberg

(2017) discussed that stakeholder model has three main components the descriptive, the reality of how a company operates, the instrumental, the practice results in better outcomes, and the normative, the moral and fairness aspects. In agreement with Balakrishnan, Malhotra, and Falkenberg, Jiyun Wu and Wokutch (2015) discussed the three components of the stakeholder model as descriptive the reality of how a company interacts with various groups, instrumental the practice results in better outcomes, and normative the moral rights of stakeholders. In consideration of the normative dimension Balakrishnan et al., discussed that is where they believe that stakeholder theory is lacking a foundation due to stakeholders tended to act in their self-interest. In examining normative dimension Balakrishnan et al., looked at Tata groups in India use of trusteeship and stewardship as a way of taking a multi-layered approach to the balance of societal goals and self-interest to create shared value for the company and stakeholders. Balakrishnan et al., discussion of stakeholders and the use of trusteeship and stewardship relied heavily on Mahatma Gandhi, the concept of trusteeship and societal expectations.

Further examination of the normative construct Jiyun Wu and Wokutch (2015) stated that Freeman's stakeholder theory is based on western ideas and thinking. As such Jiyun Wu and Wokutch, argues that within the normative component of stakeholder theory there is should be a consideration for an eastern culture whereby the stakeholder theory takes on a situational ethics aspect. As western companies expand into eastern markets, the idea of horizontal stakeholder engagement becomes vertical in Confucian society (Jiyun Wu & Wokutch). Jiyun Wu and Wokutch, point out that in western culture in particular with the United States, companies are considered as a moral person by the

supreme court decisions, most recently *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* and *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* which has implications within a Confucian context which emphasizes morality within a person. Confucian ethic according to the Jiyun Wu and Wokutch, can mean that there is an unequal treatment of people as a way to preserve a social order as opposed to western equalitarian approach. The implication is that within the application of stakeholder theory is the humanness and social context as such applying Confucian ideals within the stakeholder framework may lead to favoring particular stakeholder groups more than others leading to uneven conflict resolutions (Jiyun Wu & Wokutch).

Looking at the complexities of PPP projects particularly with BOT projects it is essential to understand the cultural context of the project. Recognizing that stakeholders can affect a project's outcome both positively and negatively how companies identify their stakeholders and develop strategic interventions based on cultural considerations may impact project success. Verweij, Teisman, and Gerrits (2017) found that stakeholder engagement and a partnership culture played a significant role in successful PPP outcomes. Similarly, Lückmann and Färber (2016) discussed understanding own cultural predisposition when considering Stakeholder Theory. Furthermore, Lückmann and Färber discussed the vital importance of cultural understanding and the ability to adapt to different cultures as part of developing effective stakeholder engagement.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

Freeman (2010) puts forth the idea of stakeholder engagement as a company function directly relates to the company's goals. Mok, Shen, and Yang (2015)

point out that uncertainty along with controversies can lead to project delays and challenges in stakeholders management. Engagement of stakeholder has several desired outcomes. One outcome as Dentoni, Bitzer, and Pascucci (2016) discussed is that engagement can mean learning from stakeholders in an iterative process of exchanging ideas to find innovative approaches to problems within the project. Similarly, Dentoni et al. looked at learning from stakeholders, with the possible result in developing greater understanding and finding different approaches to problems. Interestingly when Dentoni et al., studied 50 large agri-foods companies involved in cross-sector partnerships they found an inverse U-shaped curve developed as companies instantly learn and change from stakeholder engagement but later towards implementation as companies reach their initial goals stakeholders engagement drops off. In the context of PPP water projects, the long-term expectation of stakeholders would make the inverse U-shaped curve observed by Dentoni et al., less than ideal since it would indicate that lack of engagement during the operational phase of the project.

Aaltonen and Kujala (2016) discussed the importance of formal structures and processes as part of the institutional context for stakeholder engagement. Boyer, Van Slyke, and Rogers (2016) looked at PPP projects and found that communication was vital both virtually and in-person. Additionally, the use of website for the distribution project information and to collect citizen views (Boyer et al., 2016). Di Maddaloni and Davis (2017) discussed that companies should spend more resources at the front end of a project and develop a stakeholder engagement plan to include a range of stakeholders. In developing stakeholder engagement strategies, there is often the idea of linking the idea



of value creation as a means to influence stakeholder behavior. Lankoski, Smith, and Van Wassenhove (2016) looked at Stakeholder value creation and the importance of considering stakeholders from their perspective rather than a managerial one. Lankoski et al. discussed that stakeholders judge value in relative terms against a reference state that may be different with various stakeholders could change over time and perceived losses are weighed more heavily than any comparably sized gains. Di Maddaloni and Davis discussed that focusing on technical issues of public projects can result in poor stakeholder management and that perceived adverse impacts to the community can affect project results. To mitigate against adverse impacts Di Maddaloni and Davis, conclude that large public projects should engage in stakeholder identification and management in the planning stages of projects as well throughout the life of the project.

### **Stakeholder use in public-private partnerships projects**

PPP projects can offer several advantages to local governments looking to bridge funding or technical knowledge gaps to provide needed water infrastructure. Despite advantages, PPP projects have several issues and concerns that had led to cost overrun or even early termination of contract putting that cost to the private business. To increase the success rate, several authors have looked at CSF within PPP projects. Many CSFs are directly related to external stakeholders. An examination of stakeholder theory advocates for a stakeholder engagement to achieve the company's goals (Freeman, 2010). A company's use of stakeholder engagement can provide a mechanism to help address the CSFs and bring project success with the understanding that there is some question on the

definition of stakeholders and the normative construct the theory. I looked at several relevant case studies with stakeholder engagement.

**Kenya's case study.** Maina and van Graan (2017) examined various stakeholders involved in Kenya's water resources especially identifying those stakeholders who were under-recognized in the larger stakeholder context. Maina and van Graan used a case study approach to understand interaction and pathways of stakeholder interest with various water projects. Maina and van Graan decided to use two phases distinct to look at marginalized communities of Samora Machel in Cape Town and Tosha Biogas Centre in Nairobi and communities in Nairobi and Kiambu Counties of Kenya regarding water resources. Maina and van Graan used the first phase to identify and collect data and the second phase to make a pattern matching analysis. Maina and van Graan collected data from the interviews, direct observations and documents. Maina and van Graan, were able to develop distinct pathways of stakeholder involvement from which they discussed an ideal sequence of defining the project by using political agencies to mobilize community members. Maina and van Graan then discussed the importance of design consultation with stakeholder while adhering to local regulations. Lastly, Maina and van Graan discussed that governmental agencies need to meet with community representatives to gain an understanding of the impact of the new facilities, with learning workshops held with the community organizations who will receive the facilities. Maina and van Graan work is indicative of a straight line approach to stakeholder engagement compared to Lückmann and Färber (2016) focused more on the cultural aspects of stakeholder

engagement. Cultural aspects of a project can be important factor in identifying all of the relevant stakeholders for a project.

Similar to Maina and van Graan (2017) examination of identifying stakeholders who were under-recognized in the broader stakeholder context, Lückmann and Färber (2016) looked at the culture within the context of managing a project and the associated stakeholders. Lückmann and Färber used a method of quantitative content analysis of 24 published case studies. Based on the Lückmann and Färber, analysis some international projects had difficulties managing stakeholders from different cultural backgrounds leading to negative outcomes most often costly project delays. Similar to Verweij et al. (2017) findings that not accounting for stakeholder culture in engagement strategies can impact project success. When Lückmann and Färber (2016) looked at reasons, they found that lack of trust on behalf of the stakeholder seemed to be the most important and related not understanding the hierarchal level and communicating effectively. In developing stakeholder engagement strategies an understanding, the cultural context should be a consideration especially for companies that are operating outside their normal cultural context.

**Ashford's case study.** Mzembe (2016) looked at stakeholders engagement practices and processes within a qualitative case study with Ashford Africa (Ashford) a mining company subsidiary of Ashford international. Mzembe discussed that stakeholder engagement has four activities buffering, co-optation, mutual learning, and meta-problem solving strategies. In the findings, Mzembe found that Ashford stakeholder engagement focused on community development projects and creating relationships with community

leaders and elites. As Ashford moved from the planning phases to operational phases, Mzembe, reported that the community lost confidence in local leadership and company experienced stakeholder friction. Mzembe found that Ashford's community development strategy was not robust enough and not oriented to engage communities through inclusion in the decision-making process. Mzembe, also found that Ashford's unwillingness to address actual and environmental issues lead to increased activism. In comparison, Leong (2015) found that in the Jakarta's experience in framing water privatization as a simple issue of for or against, limits the understanding of the issues especially the perceived human right to water. Similar to Aaltonen and Kujala's (2016) discussion on having institutional pathways with formal structures and processes, Mzembe stated that in Ashford's case that companies need to embrace a wide range of stakeholders and have a definite engagement plan with communication structures.

**India's case study.** Mathur (2017) looked at India and the issues India has had with poor water system performance. To meet India challenges public-private partnerships (PPP) are one tool (Mathur). Mathur, case study looked at a second-phase PPP project that involved rebuilding infrastructure and then performing operations and management of an urban water system within three cities with a population of approximately 2 million. Mathur developed five conclusions or critical insights based on looking at the input and outputs of the case study. Similar to Mzembe (2016) and Aaltonen and Kujala (2016) The infrastructure needs to be stable and support intended use, and management contracts may be more acceptable to the consumer than long-term

concessions, being inclusive of different economic level consumers, an inclusive decision making with local stakeholders and supportive institutional environment (Mathur).

The case studies that I have reviewed demonstrate that my research question looking at external stakeholder engagement strategies to increase PPP water completion rates is worthwhile. Public-Private Partnership projects represent a complicated business model that has the potential to be negatively impacted by external stakeholders. Developing effective stakeholder management strategies can assist companies in developing mitigation programs.

### **Transition**

The purpose of my qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates. In addressing my study purpose, I reviewed the background of the study, developed a problem statement and purpose statement. Also, I examine the nature of the study and develop the research question for the study. In support of answering the research question, I developed a list of interview questions and framed the research question with the conceptual framework for the study. I also defined the assumptions, limitations, and delimitation for the study. In concluding this section, I examined the literature to understand the forms of PPP, the benefits, and issues surrounding PPP usage. Additionally, I examined how stakeholder theory is applied to the PPP project as well as looking at areas that are in tension with the theory.

For section 2 of this study, I considered my role in data collection, as well as the research design and method considerations for this study. Additionally, I discussed data

collection and analysis for this study as well as the related reliability and validity of the collected data. In section 3 of this study, I have presented the findings and the relevance to professional practice. Additionally, I have made recommendations based on my findings, for business practices, possible areas and directions for future research.

## Section 2: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates. In this section, I examined my role in data collection, as well as the research design and method considerations for this study. I also discussed the participants as well as ethical considerations related to working with individuals. Finally, I address data collection and analysis and discuss how I have confirmed the reliability and validity of the collected data.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates. The study population consisted of three leaders within a company in the southwestern region of the United States that engage in PPP projects needing improved sources of water and who have successfully used external stakeholder engagement to improve their water infrastructure project completion rates. The implications for social change include the potential for more private companies to be successful in public partnerships to complete needed water infrastructure projects increasing the use of improved sources of water for local communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the qualitative researcher is to use of research questions and qualitative methods to collect data so that the researcher can make evaluations of practices and processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A qualitative researcher's data

consists of interviews, documentation, and other types of data that the researchers uses to understand the research question (Stake, 2010). In constructing my case study as the researcher, I focused on open-ended interview questions as I sought to understand the overarching research question.

Part of the data collection is for the researcher to ensure that the participants' ideas and thoughts are conveyed accurately and without undue personal bias (Park & Park, 2016). Semistructured interviews have been used as the primary collection instrument in my study. My use of semistructured interviews allow the participant to express how they see the situation while allowing a researcher to seek clarification when needed (Jenner, 2018). Additionally, interviews can provide a benefit when looking into nonreproducible past events (Mol, Silva, Rocha, & Ishitani, 2017). Opara, Elloumi, Okafor, and Warsame (2017) discussed that the importance of interview questions that directly relate to the research question and do not introduce a bias. To minimize bias and for consistency, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) for each participant. As a researcher, I relied on the participants' willingness to candidly share their thoughts and experiences related to the overarching research question.

As a researcher, it was vital to ensure that each participant is respected and protected from harm resulting from their participation (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). According to the Belmont Report (1978), researchers should follow specific methods when working with participants. As a researcher, it is vital that I have obtained informed consent from each participant. Informed consent involves comprehensive information regarding nature,



the purpose of the study, and how the information is used and stored so that the participants have sufficient information to decide on their participation (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). The information presented must be clear and understandable, and the researcher must ensure that there is comprehension of the information presented so that participant can make an informed choice on their participation (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). Lastly, I have notified potential participants that participation in the study voluntary, and the agreeing to participate is solely up to the participant. I have also ensured that participants are free of undue influence or coercion.

Yin (2018) observed it is essential to understand my own bias and to ensure that I monitor them throughout the study process. My bias stems from many years working in a regulatory capacity with many public and private water systems within Maricopa County, a political subdivision of the State of Arizona. My work with water systems has given me the knowledge to understand from technical side the construction-related activities that new water systems undergo. This knowledge should help to build a relationship and trust with the participants.

To mitigate personal bias Yin (2018) discussed the importance of research ethics. To meet ethical standards, I have adhered to Walden University's institutional review board (IRB) policies. Yin also discussed the idea that bias can be reduced as part of demonstrating the reliability of the study through a set and repeatable procedures. For my study, I have a set interview protocol (see Appendix A) for each interview. The interview

protocol includes interview questions and member checking. Stake (2010) discussed that the member checking method is a way to ensure the accuracy of the interpreted interview

### **Participants**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed that the participants are vital since they adjust their strategies to find effective solutions. In the case of this study, I sought to understand a company's approach to strategies with the external stakeholders that the participants used successfully. Stake (2010) discussed the importance of purposeful sampling with a selection criterion. In looking at a company's external stakeholders, Chan and Oppong (2017) discussed the importance of project managers applying the appropriate strategies to facilitate project completion. Freeman (2010) discussed the need to allocate company resources to be successful in strategies of stakeholder engagement. For this study, I have included three participants employed by a company who are currently in a self-identified leadership position and who have been responsible for strategy implementation and associated allocation of resources with the successful PPP water project. A successful PPP water project is one that is brought to completion with minimal delays due to stakeholder interactions.

Yin (2018) discussed the importance of gaining access to the participants and relevant documents. Condit et al. (2016) discussed getting informed consent and protecting participants identity is the most common communitive experience in research. In setting communication expectations, it is important to understand that the roles of the researcher and participant may vary depending on personal beliefs (Condit et al. 2016). Understanding that participants may have certain expectations have led me to develop

communication strategies. Edirisingha, Abarashi, Ferguson, and Aitken (2017) discussed the importance of building a rapport that fosters an environment of trust and mutual commitment in examining communication strategies. Part of building rapport is a degree of self-disclosure as described by Hartup (2016) to facilitate trust and equalize the relationship. For self-disclosure, I related to the participant in broad terms the challenges in public works construction and stakeholder interactions that I have experienced making sure that I return to the importance of learning about participants' experiences. My strategies for gaining access to participants was to first reach out to professional organizations involved in the field and to examine trade journals. I used public information available on the internet to identify a company and participants that meet the screening criteria. I also used commercial websites such as LinkedIn to make connections and foster relationships that have allowed for building rapport with the participants.

### **Research Method and Design**

I have designed this study as a qualitative case study design to explore strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP water completion rates. Yin (2018) discussed using the research question to determine the research method. In alignment with the research question, the qualitative case study method is useful in understanding the how and why of study phenomenon (Yates & Leggett, 2016).

### **Research Method**

Three research methods to consider for a study include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A researcher using the qualitative method relies on open-ended questions and the individual's response based on their

understanding of the study phenomenon (Stake, 2010). A researcher uses the quantitative method for testing various hypotheses with quantified data (Gog, 2015). Mixed methods involve using both qualitative and quantitative methods within the same study (Venkatesh, Brown, & Sullivan, 2016). In this study, I have not used the quantitative method as I have not tested a hypothesis or collected quantified data as I look to understand the participants' experience with stakeholder engagement. In this study, I have not used the mixed method since I have not tested a hypothesis or collected the quantified data needed for the quantitative method portion of the mixed methods approach.

A researcher uses the qualitative method to collect observational data (Stake, 2010). The data collected using qualitative methods may include field observations, direct interviews and archival information (Stake, 2010). Researchers use qualitative research to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon through open-ended questions of individuals (Park & Park, 2016). A researcher uses the data collected as a result of the use of open-ended questions in interviews and or direct observations to develop themes and categories as an essential part of the qualitative research (Yates & Leggett, 2016).

In contrast, a researcher uses the quantitative method to test various hypotheses (Gog, 2015). In testing hypotheses, a researcher will use independent and dependent variables (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A researcher uses statistical methods to analyze the quantitative data to assist a researcher in framing their findings (Park & Park). For this study, I have not tested a hypothesis as I sought to understand the research question from the participant's experience.

The third method the researcher can use is the mixed methods. Within the mixed method, the researcher uses both qualitative and quantitative methods within the same study (Venkatesh et al., 2016). The mixed method approach is designed to leverage qualitative and quantitative methods to provide the researcher with flexibility in the study of the phenomenon (Venkatesh et al.). As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed, the mixed method has three primary designs of convergent, explanatory and exploratory driven by the research question and the expected data. Stake (2010) emphasized that a researcher can improve the richness of their evidence and findings through the use of the mixed method. In examining the three methods, I believe that the qualitative method aligns best with this study as I have been focusing on how and why of a company's external stakeholder strategies and have not tested a hypothesis as found in the quantitative methods or mixed methods.

### **Research Design**

I considered four research designs: (a) phenomenology (b) ethnography (c) narrative inquiry, and (d) case study. In considering the research design, I sought to align with the study's overarching research question. Researchers use phenomenology in understanding the lived experiences of the individual often focusing on a singular experience or event (Mol, Silva, Rocha, & Ishitani, 2017). Song (2017) further discussed that phenomenology research has limits as to application outside the context of the participants' experiences. Sturgess (2018) discussed phenomenology could help with understanding organizational communication based on an individual meaning of an experience. The phenomenology design would not align with this study as I sought to

understand the company's stakeholder strategies and not a singular event or lived experience.

A researcher uses an ethnographic design to examine the culture and similar behaviors within a homogenous group of people (Mol et al.). Newth (2018) discussed that the use of ethnographic design might be beneficial in certain types of social business research by allowing the researcher to better understand human action. Researchers using the ethnographic design explore expressed values and patterns of ongoing human behavior in the field (Yates & Leggett, 2016). An ethnographic design is not aligned with this study since I have not looked at cultural concerns of ongoing human behavior in a field setting.

Researchers use narrative inquiry design to tell a story of an event and the related life experiences of a discrete group of individuals (Yates & Leggett, 2016). Drennan (2018) observed that researchers use narrative inquiry design as a means of capturing the story of policy decisions or historical events. Samah (2018) pointed out that the researcher has to accurately recount the participants' narratives or ethical risk concerns with misrepresentations of the study event. Narrative inquiry design would not align with the research question on external stakeholder strategies as I have sought to explain those relevant strategies.

The research design that best aligns with the research question is the case study design. Case study design allows the researcher to look at the *how and why* they try to explain a present situation (Yin, 2018). Similarly, Yates and Leggett (2016) discussed that the case study design is suited for contemporary events outside the control of the

researcher. Tumele (2015) discussed that the researcher should ensure that the case study design aligns with the research question and expected data collection. My research question is looking at how and why of stakeholder engagement strategies with PPP projects in alignment with the case study methodology

### **Population and Sampling**

The sampling method for my single case study sampling was purposeful sampling. Palinkas et al. (2015) discussed purposeful sampling as a means to select a case or cases that are relevant to a phenomenon and can provide a researcher with sufficient information to a researcher. Benoot, Hannes, and Bilsen (2016) discussed that as a practical means purposeful sampling is useful when a phenomenon's expertise is limited, or research constraints occur. I have chosen a critical case that demonstrates successful stakeholder engagement strategies with PPP water project. Critical case sampling can facilitate the transfer of a researcher's findings to other similar cases (Suri, 2011). My sampling involves choosing a company with demonstrated success as it relates to a PPP water project. Palinkas et al. (2015) discussed the importance of understanding how to define the case study sampling criteria. The definition that I have used for successful PPP water project was one where the project was brought to completion with minimal delays due to negative stakeholder interactions.

To determine the number of individual participants to potentially interview at the target company I consider several factors. Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016) discussed the sample size should achieve data saturation while answering the research question. For semistructured interviews, the selection criteria involve individuals from

the study company who are self-identified as having leadership roles within the company for stakeholder engagement strategies throughout the selected project.

Within a single case study, one interview may prove to provide sufficient to generate a valid insight while over 30 interviews may be too extensive to work with and produce a meaningful analysis (Boddy, 2016). I have conducted semi structured interviews in person at a location based on the participant's preference. I have ensured the use the interview protocol to guide the interview with each participant. The interview process that I detailed continued until the data collected became saturated.

Part of ensuring data saturation is examining the idea of diminishing returns. Rowlands, Waddell, and Mckenna (2015) discussed the idea of diminishing returns whereby conducting interviews and data collection does not generate new or unique concepts, and data saturation is achieved. Additionally, Fusch and Ness (2015) discussed that qualitative data collected through interviews should not have an arbitrary number but instead focus on the collection of data that is a detailed representation of the study phenomenon. Fusch and Ness discuss that data saturation occurs when further data collection will not develop additional themes or information. With my study, I continued conducting interviews until no new unique concepts emerge relating to stakeholder engagement.

### **Ethical Research**

The performance of ethical research and the protection of participants is an essential function of the researcher (Yin, 2018). Protection of participants involves their informed consent, protection of their confidentiality and minimizing any impact on their



daily lives (Wurm & Napier, 2017). Informed consent involves the disclosure of clear and comprehensive information regarding the nature and the purpose of the study as well as how their information is used and stored. The goal of the informed consent process is that the participants have sufficient information to decide on their voluntary participation in the study. The informed consent process involves each participant receiving a consent form with information on the study and their rights and mechanism to withdrawal from the study.

To ensure compliance with ethical standards, I have adhered to Walden University's IRB policies. As part of the IRB process, several important steps of data collection is reviewed including the informed consent, interview questions, and the use of collected data. Walden University's IRB approval is an essential step in documenting the protection of participants during data collection. The Walden University IRB approval number for this research study is 02-01-19-0676775 and expires January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. In addition to Walden University's IRB approval, I have ensured the confidentiality of the company and participants the company through referring to as "company X" and each participant as a letter of the alphabet starting with A. The interview begins with a reminder to the participant that their participation is voluntary they can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. I did not offer incentives to participants. I did inform the participants that the study findings are available to them upon request. All data that I collect or created is password protected and routinely backed up to cloud storage ensuring that I have exclusive access. In accordance with Walden University's policy, five years after the publication of this study I will ensure that all raw data is destroyed.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

An essential step in data collection for my study is selecting the proper data collection instrument. Yin (2018) discussed that the researcher is the primary data collection instrument. Similarly, Clark and Vealé (2018) discussed the role of the researcher to be the primary access for participants and to gather and analyze information related to the research question. As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument for this study. Yates and Leggett (2016) discussed that in qualitative research it is crucial for the researcher to intimately involved with data collection and the subsequent analysis.

Yin (2018) discusses several sources of data for a case study including documentation, archived records, interviews, observations, and physical artifacts. I have used both the interviews and public documentation with this study. Feuerstein et al. (2018) discussed that interviews could create value for a researcher by allowing participants to express their experiences with the study phenomenon in their own words. Interviews can also be beneficial when looking into past events that can not be replicated by the participants (Mol, Silva, Rocha, & Ishitani, 2017). Along with interviews, public documentation can provide additional data. Yin (2018) discussed that public documents could help to clarify and reinforce the information received in an interview. Similarly, Stake (2010) discussed that documentation could provide insights as to how something works. I have used the governmental websites as the primary sources of public documentation for the study project. I have also looked at other public sources of information such as internet news sites.

I have chosen the semistructured interview format for this study. Semistructured interviews allow the participant to express how they see the situation while allowing a researcher to seek clarification when needed (Jenner, 2018). Opara, Elloumi, Okafor, and Warsame (2017) discussed that the importance of interview questions that directly relate to the research question and do not introduce a bias. To minimize bias and for consistency, an established interview protocol was used (see Appendix A) for each participant. With semistructured interviews asking open-ended questions can help participants to express unique information about the phenomenon (Stake, 2010). I have invited the participants from the selected company through a formal invitation to an interview consisting of six open-ended question that was audio recorded with the participant's consent. At the conclusion of the interview, I ensured that each participant received information as to the next steps including a transcript review and member checking.

To assist in addressing the reliability and validity of my data collection, I have used the member checking process. The member checking method is a way to ensure the accuracy of the interpreted interview data (Stake, 2010). The first part of member checking involves following up with the participants after their interview providing a transcript of their interview for review and ensuring that transcript reflects their experiences as they relate to the study question (Welch & Piekkari, 2017). The next step is for a researcher to produce a synthesis of each of the participant's answers which are provided to the participant to check the interpretation for errors or incomplete information (Iivari, 2018). During the member checking process, the participants initiate

data corrections with changes note as part of the chain of evidence process as described by Yin (2018).

### **Data Collection Technique**

Primary qualitative data collection consists of semistructured interviews with a review of additional relevant documentation. Interviews allow the participants to provide insights and information pertinent to the study phenomenon (Jenner, 2018). Hogan, Hinrichs, and Hornecker (2016) discussed that interviews could provide information on participants processes and approaches to situations and problems. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) reviewed the three types of interview types structured, semistructured and unstructured. Structured interviews have determined questions and are useful in gathering demographic data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Unstructured interviews have no set questions and can be helpful in gathering information for future study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The use of semistructured interviews allows the participant to express how they see the situation and for a researcher to cover the study phenomenon (Teixeira Vinci, Lopes Rijo, de Azevedo Marques, & Alves, 2017). I chose the semistructured interview format for the ability to receive information on how the participants perceive the study phenomenon.

A part of gathering data through interviews involves gaining access to the target population, ensuring sufficient resources and preparation for unanticipated events (Yin, 2018) Prior invites to each participant allow the interviews take place at an agreed time that was convenient to the participant. As Yin points out, the researcher must cater to the participants' schedules and availability during the interview process. I conducted the

interview in-person at a location that was most convenient to the participant. During the interviews, I have followed the established interview protocol (see Appendix A) to ensure consistency between interviews and to reduce researcher bias. Teixeira Vinci et al. (2017) discussed the importance of having an interview script to ensure consistency and to facilitate a researcher's collection of data related to the study.

I started the interview following the script with a brief discussion on the interview process, the overarching research purpose and ensuring that participant was comfortable with the process including their right to withdraw without consequences and their consent to be audio recorded. Hogan et al. (2016) discussed the importance of audio recording to ensure accurate transcription and subsequent analysis. During the interview, I asked six questions with follow up questions as needed that are relevant and sought to encourage a participant to expand or clarify their statements. I did paraphrase and take notes during the interview to add to the data collected. At the conclusion of the interview, I thanked the participant, and discussed the next steps including following up with the participant for member checking.

Yin (2018) discussed that in addition to the interview public documents can provide additional sources of the information. I have used governmental and company websites as the primary sources of public documentation for the study project. I have also looked at other public sources of information such as internet news sites and relevant blog sites. My goal was to augment the interview process with relevant information so that I may be able to use triangulation effectively.

Member checking is a method to ensure the accuracy of the interpreted interview data as well a way to bring forth more information from a participant (Stake, 2010). Following the interview, I have provided each participant with a transcription of their audio recording to help ensure accuracy. It is essential for a researcher to follow up with each participant to ensure that the words within the transcript reflect the participant's intended meaning (Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). Once the transcript was accurate to the participants original meaning, the further processing can begin. Each participant was invited to examine the syntheses of their answers to ensure that it free from interpretation errors and to add missing or incomplete information (Iivari, 2018). Iivari (2018) points out that the process of member checking may take several iterations until the syntheses reflect the participant's reality and a researcher receives no new information. When completed the member checking process can help improve the credibility of the researcher's findings (Varpio et al., 2017)

One advantage in the using interviews for data collection is that it allows participants in an interview to express in their own words their experience successes and failures provides value to the researcher (Feuerstein et al., 2018). However, as Hogan, Hinrichs, and Hornecker (2016) observed interviews could have challenges as participants can find it difficult to describe their experiences accurately. Documents can provide an additional source of knowledge and information that augments the interview process and can assist in the researcher's ability to perform triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Yin (2018) discussed that public documents could help to clarify and reinforce the information received in an interview. Documentation can also provide

additional insights as to how something works (Stake, 2010). The documents relevant to this case study relate to the project including project produced documents and news media. Merriam and Tisdell discussed that documents including public records might have an inherent bias depending on the intended purpose and use. Understanding the context of the document allows the researcher to catalog the data appropriately and enable the researcher to analyze the data for relevance (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Data Organization Technique**

I have collected data and information from a variety of sources for this study. Perrier and Barnes (2018) discussed data management with the goals of maintaining data integrity and research replication. Additionally, an inventory of all the data collected, notes and collaborating information is stored securely and methodically in a way that the researcher can understand (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Yates and Leggett (2016) discussed that a researcher must work and be familiar with all the data collected from production to interpretation. As a researcher having a catalog of the source data collected including the chain of evidence as described by Yin (2018) is vital in demonstrating the reliability of the data. All the data that I collected through the interview, transcribed interviews and project related documents is electronic. I have used an Excel spreadsheet with date created, brief description and hyperlink to the folder and file location. I have password protected and have routinely backed up relevant files to secure cloud storage. Five years after the publication of this study I will ensure the destruction of all raw data is completed according to Walden University's policy.

### **Data Analysis**

I have performed a qualitative case study on stakeholder engagement strategies with PPP projects. Data collection for my study includes semistructured interviews and public documentation. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed that data analysis embeds into the data collection process, where the examination of each new piece of data allows the data to become focused and reflective of the research question. The idea that a researcher examines data collected on a continuous basis to ensure that it captures the study phenomenon is also part of the triangulation process (Stake, 2010). Researchers use the triangulation method in case studies to improve the credibility of a study though looking at a study phenomenon through several perspectives (Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). Joslin and Müller (2016) discussed four types of triangulation: (a) process data, (b) investigator, (c) methodological, and (d) theory. For this study, I have used the methodological method for triangulation of the collected data. Joslin and Müller discussed that one method of methodological triangulation is to use two data collections of the same design type. For this study, I have used qualitative data of semistructured interviews and public project documentation for triangulation.

Triangulation occurs when through the analysis of collected data ideas and concepts converge (Yin, 2018). My study's data collection consists of semistructured interviews with additional relevant project documentation. Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin (2016) discussed the use of software in data analysis to assist in facilitating researcher to examine the data for concepts and ultimately the interpretation of the data. I have used NVivo 12 for Mac to process and analyze transcribed interview data and the



collected project documents by applying various codes to the data. The concept of coding is to develop a code that represents a concept or aspect of an idea in the source data that is of interest to the research question (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed coding as a way for a researcher to construct categories or themes within the data. The process of coding and development of themes is an iterative process and continues until no new ideas or concepts emerge (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I have developed themes that are reflective of my research question and conceptual framework for this study. The major themes that I develop include stakeholder identification, stakeholder engagement, stakeholder effectiveness, and PPP completion rates. I assign a node within NVivo12 to correspond with the major theme. The various themes are examined and grouped into categories that can address the research question. My examination of the data allows for the further development of child nodes within the larger themes. Onwuegbuzie and Weinbaum (2017) discussed the importance of continuing to look at the new literature to assist in understanding the context of the study phenomenon. By incorporating the themes that develop from the data with new literature has allowed me to construct a narrative for the phenomenon.

### **Reliability and Validity**

One of my purposes for doing this doctoral study was that I might contribute to the further understanding in the area of my research question. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed that research needs to demonstrate the traits of reliability, and validity to increase the value to fellow researchers and practitioners. Reliability speaks to ensuring that a researcher's findings are consistent with the data collected while validity looks to

demonstrate how a researcher's conclusions capture the reality of the study phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell).

### **Reliability**

Reliability and dependability of data are necessary considering that a researcher's conclusions and findings directly relate and depend on the data collected. The researcher must be able to demonstrate that the collected data is stable and consistent (Park & Park, 2016). Researchers can demonstrate reliability by using a data collection protocol (Yin, 2018). For my study interviews are one of the primary sources of data. I have developed an interview protocol with an interview script. Teixeira Vinci et al. (2017) discussed the value of interview script in ensure consistency across multiple interviews. My data collection reliability is enhanced by following an interview script ensuring consistent data collection from each participant.

To demonstrate dependability of my collected data, I have used a transcript review in conjunction with member checking. Transcript review is a researcher following up with each participant to ensure that the words within the transcript reflect the participant's intended meaning (Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, & Rees, 2017). Welch and Piekkari (2017) discussed that it is also essential that the participant experiences within the transcript relate to the study question. I ensure that each participant has an opportunity to review their transcript and to insert changes as necessary to reflect their meaning and experience. Yates and Leggett (2016) discussed the importance of correcting transcription inaccuracies before further data analysis.

Dependability of my study is enhanced by ensuring that the data collected is stable and it reflects the intended meaning.

Following the transcript review, I have used member checking method to further enhance dependability. Member checking is a method to ensure the accuracy of the interpreted interview (Stake, 2010). Each participant was invited to examine the syntheses of their answers to ensure that it free from interpretation errors and to add missing or incomplete information (Iivari, 2018). Iivari (2018) points out that the process of member checking is an iterative process until the researcher's syntheses reflect the participant's reality. Stake (2010) discussed that the member checking process is complete when the participants recognize that the information collected is accurate and correctly reflects the study phenomenon. When completed the member checking process can help improve the credibility of the researcher's findings (Varpio et al.) Dependability of my study was enhanced by using member checking by ensuring to ensure that the conclusions are consistent with the collected data of the participants meaning.

### **Validity**

Validity encompasses ideas and actions on the part of the researcher to examine their findings to understand how closely they resemble the study phenomenon (Yates & Leggett, 2016). (Yin, 2018) Discussed triangulation as one method of validity. Triangulation looks to the analysis of points of collected data to see if there is a conference on the study's findings (Yin, 2018). In addition to looking at the convergence of the findings, triangulation involves continuously looking at the collected data at each step to ensure that it captures the study phenomenon (Stake, 2010). Throughout the data

collection and analyzing processes, I have independently looked at themes that develop from the different data points. Varpio et al. (2017) discussed that triangulation should lead to a fully developed picture of the study phenomenon and thus show the credibility of the collected data.

Member checking is one way for a study to demonstrate credibility. Member checking is a method to ensure the accuracy of the interpreted interview data (Stake, 2010). A researcher uses the member checking process by having each participant review a synthesis of their answers to ensure that a researcher's interpretation is correct (Iivari, 2018). The member checking process can help improve the credibility of the researcher's findings (Varpio et al.)

The idea of transferability is that the researcher produces rich and detailed descriptions of the study which could aid future researchers in drawing parallels to their study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Morse (2015) asserted that researchers demonstrate study transferability by providing rich descriptions of collected data and to find such that a third party may choose to transfer that information to a new or different context. I have addressed transferability of this study by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the data that I collect so that other researchers may recognize similar results. Further, Yin (2018) discussed that the central idea of that case study needs to have a compelling how and why to the research question for third parties to view the study as beneficial. To address possible benefits of my study to the larger academic and professional community I have framed this study to examine stakeholder engagement strategies that can help drive success with business and communities looking at PPP projects.

Confirmability looks at how a study minimizes bias and ensures data accuracy (Yin, 2018). Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, and Blackman (2016) discussed confirmability in that the findings link to a process that can be replicated and reflect the participant's experiences. I have used the member checking process as a process that can be replicated ensuring data collection accuracy and as a way to reduce bias. Connelly (2016) discussed the idea of an audit trail detailing analysis and finding in addition to using member checking. As part of my study keeping detailed records of data collected is an essential part of ensuring the confirmability of my study, so that other researchers can replicate the data collection process.

Lastly, I have considered the role of data saturation in demonstrating the validity of the study. Data saturation is the point at which no new themes or information develops from the data collected (Boddy, 2016). To further refine data saturation (Rowlands et al., 2015) discussed the idea of diminishing returns whereby conducting interviews and data collection does not generate new or unique concepts, at which point the data becomes saturated. To look at saturation, I have employed a coding of the collected rich data of interviews. As each data point was coded, I looked for replication and new themes, I am aware that my data is saturated when no new themes develop and there was a replication of earlier data points occur. Fusch and Ness (2015) discussed that triangulation can also play a role in helping a researcher identify data saturation and that a researcher should be aware of their own inherent bias in looking at data saturation.

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of my qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates. In addressing my study's purpose, I examined the role that I play in data collection. Also, I considered the research design and method for this study. I also discussed the participants as well as ethical considerations related to working with individuals. The other area that I addressed in this section was the data collection and analysis and looking at the reliability and validity of the data.

In section 3 of this study, I present findings and the relevance to professional practice. Additionally, I discuss social change implementations as a result of this study. Using my study findings, I have made recommendations for business practices and looked at areas and directions for future research. Finally, I reflect on my experience and provide study conclusions.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates. In partnership with a water utility, I examined a recent design-build project for water treatment and the related stakeholder activities. Using a semistructured interview format, I interviewed three participants. The three participants served in leadership roles with stakeholder engagement strategies and represented both the utility and the engineering company.

I collected data from interviews and reviewing supporting materials of public handouts, and news reports from the public domain, that resulted in the emergence of four themes. The themes that emerged within the study broadly align with Freeman's 1984 stakeholder theory. The four themes that emerged from this study include (a) developing local knowledge of stakeholders, (b) partnering with stakeholders, (c) effective communication with stakeholders, and (d) defining stakeholder success. Though the theme of developing local knowledge of stakeholders I discussed methods the partners use their local knowledge to understand and identify external stakeholders. Within the theme of partnering with stakeholders I discussed how the partners engage with external stakeholders to have a meaningful impact. I discussed communication strategies that the partners use with their external stakeholder within the theme of effective communication with stakeholders. Within the theme of defining stakeholder success I discussed how the partners gaged their success with external stakeholder

engagement. I discussed each theme that emerged in-depth with support from the literature. Additionally, based on my findings, I will discuss the application to professional practice and implications for social change. Finally, I have presented recommendations for action and for future research.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

In this single case study, the overarching research question I sought to answer was: What strategies do leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates? For this study, I had a community partnership with a water utility within the southwestern section of the United States that had recently successfully completed stakeholder activities related to a design-build project for water treatment. The private company, in partnership with the utility, is a United States-based engineering firm with offices across the southwest.

Through the semistructured interview format, I interviewed three participants who served in leadership roles with stakeholder engagement strategies and represented both the utility and the engineering company. For confidentiality, the participants were labeled as participant A, B, and C, respectively. I transcribed the participant interviews using NVivo 12 for Mac. Also, I received copies of the project handouts and the project mailer from the participants and a public website that I then imported into Nvivo 12 for Mac. Since I sought to examine external stakeholder engagement strategies, I sought out and found one additional news article related to the study project through the internet. Yin (2018) discussed the idea of inductive coding as a mechanism of looking at the data for meaningful patterns and connections within the data that can relate to the research



question. I evaluated the collected data through the use of NVivo 12 in examining word frequencies within the transcribed interviews and project documents, I then used the idea of inductive coding to develop codes that relate to the research question. The codes that I applied to my collected data include, (a) assess the effectiveness of stakeholder strategies, (b) effective stakeholder engagement strategies, (c) identify external stakeholders, (d) key barriers to implementing engagement strategies, (e) overcome key barriers and (f) information that assist stakeholder strategies. After coding the transcripts and documents, I reviewed the data for the themes that materialized relating to the study question. The four themes that I identified for this study were (a) developing local knowledge of stakeholders, (b) partnering with stakeholders, (c) effective communication with stakeholders, and (d) defining stakeholder success.

### **Theme 1: Developing Local Knowledge of Stakeholders**

The first theme that emerged was developing local knowledge of stakeholders. Having local knowledge and experience that directly relates to the project area is valuable for stakeholder engagement. I found that all of the participants discussed their use of their local knowledge of stakeholders in the project area in identifying the relevant stakeholders. In support of the theme of developing local knowledge, all of the participants discussed the identification of residential owners adjacent to the new water treatment site as a priority. The importance of identifying adjacent property owners was evidenced by Participant C's statement of "We did a special or a more attentive notification to the neighbors that bound the property to make sure that they were fully aware of the meeting and weren't reliant on a mailing or something they might throw

away.” All of the participants discussed that local knowledge helped in identifying the types of customers that they will serve through the upgrades this includes the multi-family units that have service through one service meter. All of the participants discussed how they used several technical water delivery models to identify the customers that would receive the treated water from the new facility. Specifically, Participants B stated:

We also have the broader level in terms of folks who would be impacted by the water quality and that comes with the balancing side of the project. So, when we looked at those folks our engineers went out and did some modeling of where does that water go how far does it does out of reach and the ultimate lengths at which it might reach.

In addition, Participant C discussed that within the service area “a phase one and we did phase two with... adjustment” these adjustments were done to understand the service area and impacts to that area. I also found that the participants incorporated their experiences from earlier projects and their unique local knowledge of the project area to actively work on identifying other stakeholder groups for this project included stakeholders that may have interest in the water project due to historic environmental concerns within the proposed project area. The participants understanding of historic environmental concerns was demonstrated by Participant C’s response “We were very clear in our messaging that this is completely separate though the water will go from... plant to this plant It’s completely separate right now it has nothing to do with the ... cleanup.” I found that the collected documentation did not directly address how the participants gained their local knowledge. However, I did observe the concept of clear messaging as evidenced by the

direct mailer that was sent to individuals within the service area and in the public handouts. Both the mailer and the handouts emphasized that the project was to improve water delivery and not to address the area's historic environmental concerns as evidenced by the statement in the handout "The operational improvements are not related.... cleanup. For additional information, visit [www...](http://www...)."

In support of developing local knowledge of stakeholders Freeman (2010), discussed the importance of stakeholder identification as an essential part of the stakeholder engagement process. In examining the participants' responses, I observed the importance of local knowledge in understanding the stakeholder landscape for the project and identifying relevant stakeholders. Further, in identifying the relevant project stakeholders, Benn et al. (2016) discussed the idea of placing stakeholders in two distinct groups based on either a contractual or a non-contractual relationship. In examining the participants' responses, I noted that participants similarly relied on their local knowledge of stakeholders to segment their approach in identifying their stakeholders to either contractual and regulatory stakeholders with specific formal feedback on this project and all other external stakeholders where feedback is less formal and uncertain. In further support of this stakeholder segmentation, I recognized that Participant A looked at regulatory agencies and contractual partners as a more predictable stakeholder interaction when compared to other types of external stakeholders as evidenced by Participant A's statement:

Specially you know in this particular project ... I think this is common in formalized engagement processes like non-public ones and I'll say with our

regulators with city council there's a very formal process defined ... It's like you make us submit all and they respond to your submit... as professionals kind of doing it together so that that I think is pretty easy A lot of times at the public there may be a formal way to engage them but there's there's no responsibility on their end to engage.

Within the participants' interviews, I observed that the external stakeholders who fall outside of the regulatory agencies or political structures was a recognized challenge in stakeholder identification for all of the participants. In addressing the challenge, the participants relied heavily on their local knowledge of possible external stakeholders as well as their past experiences in identifying relevant stakeholder groups. Within the literature, Eskerod and Larsen (2018) pointed out that there is a broader context of stakeholders based on future expectations, their network, and concurrent activities. Linking the idea that external stakeholders exist within a broad network, the participants all agreed that several factors played an important role. The factors help form the participants' idea of their external stakeholders for this project including the project's location, historic environmental concerns within the service area and anticipated changes in source water.

## **Theme 2: Partnering With Stakeholders**

The second theme that emerged was partnering with stakeholders. In examining successful stakeholder engagement strategies, it is essential to develop an ongoing relationship with stakeholders through actively seeking their feedback and participation. A partnership notes this deeper involvement with a project's stakeholders in support of

this theme. I found that all of the participants discussed the idea of developing a partnership with their stakeholders to receive and incorporate feedback even if not directly expressed in the public handouts and mailer. Also, I noted that the participants felt that stakeholders have a legitimate concern with the project and that seeking a partnership within a defined space allowed for an improved project and assisted in moving the project forward without undue interference. In support of the idea of creating a partnership, Participant A discussed the importance of balancing between the demonstration of technical ability while leaving space for external stakeholder participation, specifically:

There is this balance to strike of being well-prepared and demonstrating a well thought out design or process so that there's some, I guess confidence communicated out to them that you know we have this under control and opening a very small window... I think for me a successful engagement is to be well-prepared but leave a window. I don't know, Maybe be 80 percent prepared but leave open you know it's kind of a 20 percent area [for external stakeholder engagement].

The idea of leaving space to receive feedback from external stakeholders as part stakeholder engagement for a project and a crucial aspect of creating a partnership. In further refining, the idea of leaving space for external stakeholder engagement Participant C specifically looked at creating a partnership by though inviting the external stakeholder participation by picking treatment plant paint colors and having input into landscape choices as evidenced by their statement:

[the utility had at public meetings] two architects were there to interact with the public, and I think the public felt good about that because when they talked about whether it be color...or how the building itself would look they were able to give feedback directly to the architects.

Creating this defined space within the project was a crucial part of helping to create a sense partnership with external stakeholders for this project.

The idea of creating a sense partnership with external stakeholders connects to Freeman (2010), who pointed out the importance of developing and maintaining a relationship with stakeholders and devoting resources to the relationship. Similarly, Dentoni et al. (2016) discussed that stakeholder engagement could be a way of exchanging ideas to find new approaches to stakeholder issues. In examining the participant data, I observed Dentoni et al. ideas demonstrated through the participants creating space and being open for stakeholder involvement as a way for the participants to found new ideas to resolve stakeholder concerns and prevent possible conflicts. Similarly, Osei-Kyei, Chan, Yao, and Mazher (2019) discussed conflict prevention measures, including the importance of stakeholder involvement in decisions. Within the participant's responses, I recognized that the participants found that partnering with stakeholders does reduce conflicts with the project in agreement with Osei-Kyei, Chan, Yao, and Mazher (2019) as evidenced by participant C's statement of "We didn't even get calls on the hotline so the people we cared about the most seemed content, satisfied."

Further, Ricart et al. (2019) discussed that stakeholder empowerment could strengthen trust and reduce conflict; however, it requires an investment in time and

resources. Reviewing the participants' responses, I found that the participants all recognize that activities that involve stakeholder partnership can involve significant resource allocation of time and materials, especially in the critical planning stages. A large part of the resource allocation to create the partnership with the public centered around two ideas. First idea to facilitate the partnership with external stakeholders is to have the various subject matter experts from the partners available at after-hour public events so that stakeholders may have direct access to those experts. Participant C discussed that "Because we had the building architects and the landscape architect both there and [the public was] able to talk to them were negotiating out all that kind of stuff about [plant colors and landscape choices]." The second idea was to devote resources to setup a dedicated project hotline number that I found to be prominent in the project mailer and handouts to the public. Participant A discussed that:

[The hotline] ran throughout the entire duration of the design so that people could call in and leave messages and those messages were checked and we would we had at least one meeting where we reviewed some of the comments being made on the hotline.

Based on my collected data I observed that all of the participants felt that these types of resources allocations helped to reduced potential for conflict and helped to ensure that the project successfully stayed on track by creating a partnership.

### **Theme 3: Effective Communication With Stakeholders**

The third theme that emerged was communication with stakeholders.

Communication with external stakeholders was crucial in project success. Within the data

that I collected all of the participants discussed that communicating with stakeholders was an essential consideration for their project. Also, I observed that the participants divided external stakeholders into regulatory and political stakeholders and the general public. In examining the participants' responses, all of the participants expressed that they considered both groups essential to their overall project success while developing communication strategies tailored and unique to those groups.

In support of effective communication, Freeman (2010) discusses the importance of communication with stakeholders as part of the engagement process. Further, Oppong, Chan, and Dansoh (2017) discussed that a goal of stakeholder engagement is to develop effective communication that can positively affect stakeholder behavior. The importance of stakeholder communication was evidenced by Participant B statement "It's knowing your facts, making sure that you're able to communicate those facts accurately and consistently so that people understand it so that everyone's on the same page so that people understand that this is what this particular situation." In support of communication, Participant C stated that they felt like "The time we spent on the messaging was so critical." The project handouts and the fact that Participant B reported that "forty five thousand postcards that went out" further demonstrate that messaging was a critical component of the project. The participants all expressed the idea that effective stakeholder communication is crucial in concurrence with Oppong, Chan, and Dansoh (2017) ideas.

In looking at communication, especially with the public Dean, Fielding, Jamalludin, Newton, and Ross, (2018) discussed that the public could have difficulty in



understanding technical water-related terms. The participants recognized early in the project development that stakeholders may interact with various individuals associated directly or indirectly with the project and that proper messaging was crucial. Participant C discussed:

We spent so much time on literally every single word of the flyers that we put out to announce the meetings to all the handouts that we created to make sure that they were going to walk away with what we wanted [the public] to hear.

Linking to Dean, Fielding, Jamalludin, Newton, and Ross, (2018) ideas of the importance of developing clear messaging with simple terms, I observed that all of the participants discussed the importance of ensuring the user-friendly and appropriate terms to be used with the external stakeholders. To support and ensure uniform messaging, the participants developed several handouts to inform the public and other individuals within the organization about the project and the benefits to the users. I found that the handouts had easy to access sections by categories such as “Why is the new plant necessary?”, “Treatment Process” and “What to expect of your water”. I also found that the project handouts and mailer was minimized the technical language in favor of more consumer oriented terms as an example “The improvements at the... are designed to reduce future scale formation caused by the high mineral content (or hardness) in our water.” Clear and consistent messaging along with easily accessible reference materials assisted in keeping the various project partners on message when talking about the project to external stakeholders. The importance of clear messaging is related to Oppong, Chan, and Dansoh (2017) discussion on stakeholder communication through a clear message to stakeholders

that can assist in keeping the project on track through mitigating external stakeholder concerns and preventing negative external stakeholder affects to the project.

#### **Theme 4: Defining Success**

The fourth theme that emerged was defining success. Specifically, what defines project success when employing strategies for engaging external stakeholders with PPP projects. In the examination of the collected data, I noticed that what defines project success can shift slightly depending on the participant's perspective of the project. Similarly, Wojewnik-Filipkowska and Węgrzyn, (2019) discussed PPP project success may have a unique meaning within various stakeholder groups associated to the project. One point that I found agreement on, is that all of the participants felt that the project was a success because the project timelines and the budget were not negatively associated with the external stakeholder involvement. The collected documentation did not expressly state what defines project success. However, the project documents highlight the completed project benefits such as “The.... and operational improvements to the... will have the added benefit of reducing hardness in the finished water.” I also found that the one news article available focused more on the awarded contract and the benefits to the citizens and not critique or offer complaint of the stakeholder process. I observed that participants B and C had more focus on reaching all of the possible external stakeholders, as evidenced by Participant B’s statement of:

At this point we're still looking at the fact of... kind of relying on that if we haven't had any complaints then... we're thinking there's been pretty effective [stakeholder engagement] we know with the water quality situation we put out

this postcard we had we had very few phone calls but we know people received them.

It was a project goal to ensure that they reached the maximum number of potential stakeholders to inform and educate on the need and use of the new water treatment. In contrast, Participant A was more focused on external governmental stakeholders to gain the necessary regulatory approvals and staying on time as supported by the statement of “Getting the timely go on the project where they're [external stakeholders] not... unnecessarily delaying the project through the process.”

Directly connected to defining project success, Osei-Kyei, Chan, Javed, and Ameyaw, (2017) discussed that project success is measured through two methods, either the traditional methods of time and costs or with subjective methods relating to stakeholder expectations. Further, Freeman (2010) discussed the idea that a successful project relies on the context that the company sets forth for the desired end-state. Within the collected data, I observed that while all participants wanted the project to meet time and cost metrics. However, there was a difference of how each partner approached stakeholder engagement relative to overall project success I observed that with this project, the different approaches to successfully highlight the different aspects and realities of a PPP project. With a PPP project, different partners will have different priorities depending on the project need and goals. Kivila, Martinsuo, and Vuorinen (2017) discussed that how success is measured is depended upon the project context. Within Kivila, Martinsuo, and Vuorinen (2017) idea of the project context the private company perspective of their the risk allocation may drive the definition of success to

favor the traditional project success measures of on-time and on budget. However, the political perspective may favor outreach attempts and achieving the desired end state.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

I sought to examine strategies that companies and specifically project leadership can use to engage with their stakeholders to increase their success rates with PPP water projects within Freeman's (2010) stakeholder theory. Water projects using the PPP model can provide needed infrastructure while assisting local governments to bridge funding or knowledge gaps. The World Bank Group's investment in PPP water projects in 2016 was \$1.9 billion (World Bank Group, 2017). However, project investment alone is not a guarantee that once a company enters into a PPP water project that it will be successful. As Vedachalam et al. (2016) discussed failure rates of PPP water projects have approximately a 9% failure rate representing a loss of 25% of the investment compared to 5% failure rate representing 5% loss of investment with other types of PPP projects. Furthermore, PPP project success is vital to private companies since the private company takes on a higher risk than the governmental partner when engaging in PPP projects.

PPP Water projects require more up-front expenditures, as evidenced by the bidding process. As T. Liu et al. (2016) observed that in Australia, the PPP project bidding cost could account for 2.5-4% of the total cost of the project. Additionally, PPP water projects have a lengthy implementation timeframe up to as discussed by Wang and Li (2019). Failure of a project in the bidding process or implementation can negatively impact the profitability of a company as T. Liu et al. (2016) discussed. Examining PPP water projects, higher failure rates, Vedachalam et al. (2016) discussed that PPP project

failures may be linked to actions of the external stakeholders involved with the project.

Valipour, Yahaya, Noor, Valipour, and Tamošaitienė (2019) found that political interference was the most significant risk to PPP water projects in Malaysia.

Four significant themes materialized that potentially may assist companies in developing their stakeholder engagement strategies within my findings of a successfully implanted PPP project. The themes of developing local knowledge of stakeholders and partnering with stakeholders address the issues raised by Jensen's (2017) discussion that stakeholders present challenges and can adversely affect a project outcome in time and cost or cause complete project failure. The four themes identified may apply to the business practice by addressing the CSFs in PPP water projects. Osei-Kyei et al. (2017) discussed that there are CSFs that can drive projects forward toward success. The two themes of developing local knowledge of stakeholders and partnering with stakeholders link to the idea that addressing CSFs can potentially assist in mitigating adverse stakeholder outcomes through a stakeholder engagement process as discussed by Osei-Kyei et al. (2017).

The themes that emerged of effective communication with stakeholders and defining success relates to the idea that private companies, through their business practices, may potentially reduce risk form conflicts with the external stakeholders. As part of stakeholder engagement, Osei-Kyei et al. (2019) discussed the reduction of conflict in PPP projects through highlighting the importance of communication of goals and benefits and clear roles and responsibilities. The theme of effective communication with stakeholders may assist a private company in understanding the importance of

communication within stakeholder engagement. Having clear communication, along with a complete understanding of success, can assist a private company's overall efforts in having a successful in PPP water project.

Freeman (2010) discussed the importance of stakeholder engagement for company success. The themes that emerged link to the idea of CFS for PPP water projects and revolve around the idea of stakeholder engagement. Nederhand and Klijn (2019) discussed that there might a positive relationship with project innovation and stakeholder involvement. A private company may consider implementing the ideas contained within these themes to assist the company in increasing the likelihood of a successful PPP project. From professional practice point of view, successful PPP projects may ultimately lead to a reduction in costs from negative stakeholder interactions and can help to ensure the long-term profitability of a company.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Though this study, I have examined strategies leaders can use it to increase PPP completion rates. Several local governments use the PPP model to make necessary changes or upgrades to their infrastructure (Purbo, Smith & Bianchi, 2019). Improvements to water infrastructure may have several positive improvements to the community. Leviäkangas, Kinnunen, and Aapaoja (2016) discussed health benefits from water projects could represent an intrinsic value to the well being of the community. The WHO reported in 2015, approximately 29% of the global community was without access to a safely managed water supply (World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, 2017). Vedachalam et al. (2016) discussed that in India, there is an

association with local poor water quality to the incidence of diarrhea illness with loss of over 500,000 lives annually and economic impact of 73 million fewer working days. A community having access to safe water may improve individual well being as well as support the business community.

I observed that all of the participants identified that the project would bring improved water quality within the service area. Further, all of the participants understood the local conditions and the importance of engaging the stakeholders to ensure that the project was a success. Through my identification successful stakeholder strategies private companies may be successful in PPP water projects. Successful PPP water projects can potentially provide a positive outcome to the community through improving public health and providing crucial water infrastructure support.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The four themes that emerged through from my research were (a) developing local knowledge of stakeholders, (b) partnering with stakeholders, (c) effective communication with stakeholders, and (d) defining stakeholder success. These four themes relate to actionable steps for leaders who are responsible for project success to consider. Robust stakeholder strategies may potentially help those project leaders in the private company to better engage with their external stakeholders in PPP water projects. Private industry use of improved stakeholder strategies may allow more companies to be successful in PPP projects and reduce exposure to the adverse effects of increased costs. I will seek to share the findings of my study through publishing in peer-reviewed business

and scholarly articles. I also plan to publish to LinkedIn publishing and ResearchGate as well as present the my study's findings at appropriate conferences and seminars.

### **Understanding the Local Stakeholders for the Project**

Project leaders need to understand that PPP projects exist within a local context of past and ongoing related activities, stakeholder interactions, and other influences. Leaders having an understanding the project context can help with how to best identify external stakeholders of their current projects. One or ideally, both private company and local government need to have first-hand knowledge of local stakeholders, and both partners need to be open to sharing their knowledge to that a complete picture of possible stakeholders can emerge. Lückmann and Färber (2016) discussed that developing effective stakeholder engagement involves understanding and adapting to different cultures. The project context can provide project leaders a way of identifying possible stakeholders.

Project leadership may consider taking an active role in finding and identifying potential stakeholders at the very beginning of each project. Using local knowledge, private companies may consider developing a potential list of external stakeholders for each project. Project leaders should make every effort in identifying potential stakeholders to minimize potential delays and negative project outcomes. Political and regulatory interactions are more formalized and therefore have different expectations than system users and the general public (Dormady, Jones, Roe & Rub, 2019). Information about local conditions of the project may be used to assist project leaders in developing



realistic expectations of stakeholder interactions and resource allocations between the various groups of stakeholders.

### **Creating a Partnership With Stakeholders**

Project leaders need to understand that engaging with stakeholders can be viewed as a type of partnership. Dentoni et al. (2016) discussed the importance of learning from stakeholders to gain a greater understanding of issues and problems and finding different approaches to those problems. The project leaders need to make room for stakeholder involvement to improve overall stakeholder engagement. The technical details of the project may allow the company to have regulatory and government stakeholder interactions. Concurrently, the project timing, service delivery or site aesthetics may allow the company to have interactions with users and the public stakeholders. The goal of project leadership is to find a balance between demonstrating technical competence and creating a space for stakeholder interaction and involvement. One area in particular that may be useful in creating the space for public engagement is ensuring those subject matter experts on the various project aspects are present at public meetings and that the public has an opportunity to interact with these experts directly. Having available subject matter experts is especially important for project leaders since the experts that can affect issues that stakeholders may raise including the site aesthetics, logistic routes and timing of workdays and events. Project leaders may use developing effective partnerships as a potential way to significantly improve stakeholder engagement for a project.

## **Effective Communication**

Project leaders need to understand that effective stakeholder communication is essential. Dean et al. (2018) discussed that individual users might not engage with the presented project information and that the general public can have difficulty understanding technical water terms. Project leadership needs to ensure that communication to the public is clear and free from technical jargon or terms. In addition to the facts of the project, the benefits of the project must be communicated as well to external stakeholder. Project leaders also need to ensure that anyone interacting with the stakeholders uses the same terms and information to avoid any confusion in the message. It is also vital that subject matter experts on the various project aspects are present at public meetings and forums to ensure timely and accurate information is immediately available to the stakeholders. Effective communication can reduce the potential for negative impacts on the project and associated risks to the private company.

## **Defining Successful Stakeholder Engagement**

The project leadership will need to define with the relevant partners what successful stakeholder engagement will look like for the proposed project. At a minimum, project leadership may define success as external stakeholders did not cause unnecessary delays or additional costs to the project. However, as Dean et al. (2018) Discussed that individual users could ignore or not engage in information about projects. To prevent external stakeholders negatively impacting the project in the later stages of the project efforts should be made to gauge the effectiveness of communication such as setting up a dedicated website and tracking use or sending follow up communications

about the project. Understanding the conditions for successful stakeholder engagement is especially crucial for the private company's project leaders to ensure that that successful conditions for success are understood and that proper risk allocation and the associated cost appear in the contracts.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

My study had several limitations relating to the qualitative single case study as I explored strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates. The primary limitations that I identified with this study was that the PPP framework for can be used to address needs with all types of different infrastructure projects. Through this study, I focused on a specific type to PPP project of a design-build and did not address the other forms that PPP projects can take. The second limitation of my study was that it was confined to the experiences for the participants. In this study, the participants reflected their own experiences and understanding of stakeholder engagement for this single project within their local context. While the participants' engagement strategies mirror the CSFs within the literature, no attempt was made to link the study's participants engagement strategies to global PPP water projects.

I recognized that there are areas for possible future research and directions for studying external stakeholder engagement. In addition, I recognize that there are several specific areas to explore for future research on how companies can use external stakeholder strategies to improve their PPP project completion rates. One area of expolotation may be to use several cases of PPP projects within a region to see if the themes that emerged in my study develop in a multi-case study of a particular region.

Another area of potential research is the examination of a substantial difference in the themes that develop for stakeholder engagement strategies from the different main types of PPP projects of a management contract, design-build, build-operate, and concession. Lastly, it is essential to research any common themes with stakeholder engagement strategies that develop from examining PPP projects in different geographic regions.

### **Reflections**

In this study, my bias is result of my previous professional experience. I have had considerable experience with water system operation from the perspective of the regulated community. Though the perspective of the regulatory agency, I had previously experienced stakeholder engagement. However, before conducting this study, I had not given much thought to stakeholder engagement from the private business perspective. Through conducting this study, I was allowed to explore PPP water projects through the lens of a researcher rather than a regulator. I made a conscious effort to ensure that I did not bring any preconceived ideas or my bias into the interviews and findings. I noticed the omission of direct interaction with water utilities for almost ten years help in approaching this study though minimizing my own bias. Finding participants posed a more significant challenge than I had anticipated. Many potential participants expressed concerns about time requirements to participate. I am very grateful to the participants who participated in this study for the knowledge and experiences they shared.

I believe that my experience with water system operation enhanced my interaction with the participants since we could speak the common language of system operations. The utility operational decisions were central to the decision to do a PPP project and a

key consideration with the messaging to external stakeholders for the project. My experience with water utility operations allowed me to have a common language and understanding of water system operations. I also believe that my understanding of water operational language allowed the interviews to focus on the stakeholder activities rather than having the participants explain operational terms and decisions. From this study, I learned some new insights about the importance of local knowledge, defining a space for stakeholder involvement, and what may define success. The insights that I gained relate to the use of PPP in the real world that I hope will benefit the community of water utilities, researchers, and practitioners.

### **Conclusion**

The local governments may potentially use the PPP model to leverage private companies and their experience along with technical knowledge to receive infrastructure improvements. For private companies, the PPP model can provide profitability while bringing innovation to the market. Companies employing external stakeholder engagement strategies can potentially reduce risk and assist in ensuring their project success. In this study, I explored the strategies leaders use to engage their external stakeholders in improving their PPP project completion rates. I examined a recent design-build project for water treatment and the related stakeholder activities with a PPP within the southwestern section of the United States. The four themes developed for this study include (a) developing local knowledge of stakeholders, (b) partnering with stakeholders, (c) effective communication with stakeholders, and (d) defining stakeholder success. The

four themes broadly align with Freeman's 1984 stakeholder theory and allow for several recommendations for action.

Recommended strategies include the need for leaders to understand that PPP projects exist within a local context. Companies may use local knowledge to assist in identifying external stakeholders, and in resource allocation for stakeholder engagement. Leaders need to find a balance between demonstrating technical competence and creating opportunities for stakeholder interaction and involvement. Leaders must devote resources to ensure that there is Effective communication that is clear and consistent with their partners. Lastly, it is crucial to understand and define what successful stakeholder engagement means for the project.

External stakeholders may interface with PPP water projects on many different levels. Not properly engaging with external stakeholders may lead to increases in project cost and time or even complete project failure. Effective stakeholder strategies can increase PPP water project success rates. Successful projects can provide a benefit to private companies, local governments, and the communities that they serve.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interviewer Actions	Interviewer Script
Introduce the Interview	<p>Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. The purpose of this study is to examine the research question of "What strategies do leaders use to engage external stakeholders in increasing PPP water project completion rates?". Participation in voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without consequence. The interview will consist of five questions and should take approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded, and I may take additional notes. Please feel free to ask for needed clarifications or if you need a break.</p>
	<b><u>Interview Questions</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paraphrase as needed</li> <li>• Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in-depth</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What system do you use to identify external stakeholders who play a role in your PPP project completion rates?</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. What are the most effective external stakeholder engagement strategies that you use to increase PPP project completion rates?</li><li>3. How did you assess the effectiveness of your external stakeholder strategies in increasing your PPP project completion rates?</li><li>4. What were the key barriers to implementing engagement strategies for your external stakeholders related to increasing PPP project completion rates</li><li>5. How did you overcome these key barriers?</li><li>6. What other information could you add that might apply to the external stakeholder strategies for increasing PPP project completion rates?</li></ol>
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Wrap up interview thanking participant	Thank you. That is all the interview questions for today I appreciate your responses and participation in today's interview.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview	If possible, I would like to have you review the transcript of today's interview to ensure it's accuracy and then set up a time in the next couple of weeks to go over a brief interpretation of your answers to ensure I have accurately captured your response and to provide an opportunity for you to add additional information. I would anticipate that this second session would take 30 minutes.
<b>Member Checking</b>	
Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage	Thank you for agreeing to the follow-up interview today. The purpose of this study is to look at a succinct synthesis of your answers and to provide an opportunity to add additional information. I would anticipate that this session will take about 30 minutes. Your participation in

	voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without consequence. The interview will be audio recorded, and I may take additional notes. Please feel free to ask for needed clarifications or if you need a break.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question</li> <li>• Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have been found directly relating the original interview question and adhering to the IRB approval.</li> <li>• Walk through each question, read the interpretation and ask:</li> <li>• Did I miss anything? Or, What would you like to add?</li> </ul>	Question and succinct synthesis of one paragraph for each of the five questions.
Wrap up interview thanking participant	Thank you. That is all the interview questions for today I appreciate your

	responses and participation in today's interview.
Schedule follow-up member checking interview as needed	(if significant changes are needed, or significant information is provided)

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